

Engaging Paul Ricoeur's work on memory, history, and forgetting: in search of an adequate methodology for church and theological historiography

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DECLARATION

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the authorship owner thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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ABSTRACT

Life in the present is never only about the present, but notably also about the past and the future. In this study the problematic of the representation of the past is addressed in search of a responsible historical hermeneutic. It is argued that historical hermeneutics is about the past, the present and the future, and, above all, the relation that exists between them. Historical hermeneutics facilitates our understanding of the past from our position in the present and creates meaningful ways in which we may anticipate the future.

In this study I aim to contribute to the development of responsible historical hermeneutic for church and theology, especially in South Africa. To do so, I engage with the magisterial work of the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, *Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* who, I believe, proposes valuable signposts for us to reckon with on our way to a responsible historical hermeneutic.

A general introduction is given to theological historiography and the development thereof in South Africa, pointing towards reasons why it is important for responsible historical hermeneutics to exist. The work of Paul Ricoeur is introduced as a valuable partner to dialogue with in this respect. A brief intellectual biography is given regarding Ricoeur's work in order to indicate where and how his last work fits into and forms a part of his life's work.

The third chapter of the study is an outline and discussion of Ricoeur's work, *Memory, History, Forgetting*. The discussion follows the order of Ricoeur's work itself, and I try to indicate the main lines in Ricoeur's argument, yet giving credit to him for the thorough way in which he deals with the respective themes by engaging the disciplines of philosophy, history, sociology, neurosciences etc.

Subsequently I propose certain themes from Ricoeur's work that is important for the church historian and historical theologian as signposts towards an adequate historiographical methodology.

OPSOMMING

Lewe in die hede het nie net met die hede te make nie, maar op 'n besondere manier ook met die verlede en die toekoms. In hierdie studie word die problematiek van die representasie van die verlede aangespreek in 'n poging om verantwoordelike historiese hermeneutiek te bevorder. Die argument word gevoer dat historiese hermeneutiek te make het met die verlede, die hede, en die toekoms, en bowenal die verhouding waarin dit met mekaar staan. Historiese hermeneutiek fasiliteer ons verstaan van die verlede vanuit ons posisie in die hede en skep betekenisvolle maniere waarop die toekoms geantisipeer kan word.

Die studie het ten doel om by te dra tot die ontwikkeling van verantwoordelike historiese hermeneutiek vir die kerk en vir teologie, veral in Suid-Afrika. Met hierdie doel voor oë, word die grootse werk van die Franse filosoof Paul Ricoeur, *Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, bestudeer. Die bruikbare bakens op weg na verantwoordelike historiese hermeneutiek wat Ricoeur voorstel, word uitgewys.

'n Algemene inleiding tot teologiese historiografie en die ontwikkeling daarvan in Suid-Afrika word gegee, en die belangrikheid van verantwoordelike historiese hermeneutiek sodoende uitgewys. Die werk van Paul Ricoeur word daarna ingelei as 'n waardevolle bron in hierdie gesprek. 'n Opsommende intellektuele biografie van Ricoeur se werk word gegee om aan te dui waar en hoe Ricoeur se laaste werke aansluit by sy ander werke.

Die derde hoofstuk van die studie is 'n uiteensetting en bespreking van Ricoeur se werk, *Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*. Die bespreking volg die verloop van Ricoeur se werk self, en daar word gepoog om die belangrikste lyne van Ricoeur se argument uit te lig. Terselfdertyd word erkenning gegee aan Ricoeur vir die deeglikheid waarmee hy met 'n wye verskeidenheid temas en dissiplines omgaan: filosofie, geskiedenis, sosiologie, neurowetenskappe, ens.

Ten slotte word sekere temas van Ricoeur se werk uitgelig wat belangrik is vir die kerkgeskiedkundige en die historiese teoloog as bakens op weg na 'n voldoende historiografiese metodologie.

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CHAPTER 1

SOUTH AFRICAN CHURCH AND THEOLOGICAL HISTORIOGRAPHY: CHALLENGED BY A HERMENEUTICAL DEFICIT

1. Introduction

Life in the present is never only about the present, but notably also about the past and the future. In this study the problematic of the representation of the past is addressed in search of a responsible historical hermeneutic. This study builds on the presupposition that historical hermeneutics is about the past, the present and the future, and, above all, the relation that exists between them. Historical hermeneutics facilitates our understanding of the past from our position in the present and creates meaningful ways in which we may anticipate the future.

What experience and history have taught us is that peoples and governments never learn anything from the past. What is more, they do not even trouble themselves with it. These are the paraphrased words of the great German philosopher, G.W.F. Hegel. Hegel lived in the eighteenth century, and a thing or two have probably changed since then. In the twenty first century, people are seemingly obsessed with the past. Our calendars are loaded with commemorations of significant events, and memorial monuments, professedly to prevent us from forgetting, are built before the dust of prominent occurrences can settle. However, the fact that people of the twenty first century are people who are (at least) troubled by the past, does not make them people who learn from it – or even people who know how to properly engage with it. The challenge to engage responsibly with the past is one that remains as important as ever.

In 2009 the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University celebrated its 150th birthday. It was a year loaded with events, conferences, lectures and celebrations in which the practicing and studying of theology since 1859 was commemorated. Moreover, it was not only a year of unique remembrance, but also an opportunity to creatively anticipate the challenges that the future of this theological institute may present. A celebration such as this one is by implication an opportunity to table our memories of the past, to take part in

the writing of history, and to dream about the future that awaits us. Yet, while we deal with the past, the present, and the future, it is important to be cognisant of the fact that the past – the past that we call into remembrance, the past that provides the source(s) of our historiography, and the past from which we anticipate the future – is for South Africans specifically a conflicted past. It is one filled with injustice, exclusion, and short-sightedness, but also a past of theological training, spiritual formation and social involvement. It is a past characterised by major changes and developments, paradigm shifts, and renewed identity formation.

In 2009, we, as theologians with an interest in history but also as children of our time, recalled and celebrated this complex and ambiguous past from both broader and more specific perspectives. As the church historian Justo González notes: ‘No matter how much historians might claim that they are studying the past objectively, the fact is that all historians must necessarily look at the past from their own perspectives... Furthermore, the perspective of a historian is not only a matter of the present moment but also of the vision of the future from which history is studied and written’ (González, 2002: 145). When we write history we are thus simultaneously busy with an endeavour of the past, the present and the future. This is important if we want to define the task of history. Bernard Lategan writes in an article, *History, Historiography, and Reformed Hermeneutics at Stellenbosch*, that ‘(t)he goal of history is not to understand bygone days, but to understand what remains from those times and what is still present today’ (Lategan, 2007: 169). I believe that this is exactly the challenge we have to face up to in 2009, 2010 and the years to come as we reflect on our past(s) and aim to do so in an ever more responsible way.

2. Historiography as an act of sense-making

With the abovementioned remark of Lategan in mind, we turn to another influential article of his in which he gives a critical reflection of South African church historiography, *Nuwere ontwikkelinge op die gebied van die geskiedskrywing – ‘n geleentheid vir herbesinning na 350 jaar van gereformeerdeheid?*¹ (Newer developments in the field of historiography – an

¹ Lategan, B.C. *Nuwere ontwikkelinge op die gebied van die geskiedskrywing – ‘n geleentheid vir herbesinning na 350 jaar van gereformeerdeheid?* In 350 Jaar Gereformeerde, Pieter Coertzen (ed.). 2002. CLF: Bloemfontein. Pp 269-276.

opportunity for reconsideration after 350 years of reformed tradition). Lategan explains that history is not a *reconstruction*. It is a construct in itself – something new. It may be shaped and influenced by the past, but the past never dictates history. History is an act of sense-making, and sense-making is an open project. However, before we can write history we have to ask two questions regarding the past: “how?” and “what?” These questions are important because *how* one remembers the past has a lot to do with *what* one regards as important in that past. Furthermore, Lategan argues that one’s experience of what constitutes “the past” portrays much about oneself. We do not have access to a register of recordings of everything that happened in the past, and accordingly the way we perceive the past says something about ourselves. The past is, furthermore, not a subject that is detached from our current situation – the past can only be perceived from the present, and is in fact only interesting insofar as it helps us to understand the present and to anticipate the future. Nevertheless, the past is gone for good. All that is left is history – what we remember from the past and the meaning(s) we attach to our memories. We cannot change *what* happened in the past, but *how* we understand these events and what meaning we attach to them, can indeed change. It is important to ask the “how” and the “what” questions because they help us to understand and to give meaning to the past. This is precisely what Lategan argues historiography to be: historiography is about creating meaning from our memory and understanding of the past.

Lategan continues by asserting that this understanding of historiography developed gradually. Since the days of Herodotus² and Thucydides³ the task of historiography has been a self-reflective enterprise. However, in recent decades the terrain of historiography changed drastically as the concepts of “time” and “space” came to be redefined – thereby completely changing our understanding of what history is. With the so-called “linguistic turn”⁴, one of the most prominent recent philosophical developments, the insight was gained that all pronouncements about the past are mediated by language, and thus reflect the

² In Western culture Herodotus is seen as the “father of history.” He was a Greek historian who lived in the 5th century BC, and was the first historian known to collect his materials systematically, test their accuracy to a certain extent and arrange them in a well-constructed and vivid narrative.

³ A Greek historian who lived in the 5th century BC, known as the “father of scientific history” due to his strict standards of evidence-gathering and analysis in terms of cause and effect.

⁴ The linguistic turn refers to a major development in Western philosophy in the 20th century whereby philosophy became focused primarily on the relationship between philosophy and language. Cf. Clark, E.A. 2004. *History, theory, text. Historians and the linguistic turn*.

specific perspective from which they are made. What is more, there is no reality that precedes historiography. In other words, the historian is not involved in a secondary act in which a (former) reality is reconstructed or represented, but the work of the historian is a reality on its own – a new construct. To write history is to find one's way through a large collection of seemingly unrelated and meaningless premises, to create relations between them, to couch these premises in narrative form and in this way to give meaning to them.

It is important to note that factuality is not the only concern of historiography; we do not merely ask: what happened? It is, after all, with certainty that we can say that Jan van Riebeeck arrived in the Cape in 1652, that a war took place from 1899 to 1902, that South Africa was declared a republic in 1961, and that Nelson Mandela was released from prison on 11 February 1990. Once these facts are on the table, we go further by asking “how?” and “why?” We ask about the meaning that we attach to the past, and the sense that we make of established facts.

3. South African church and theological historiography

Historiography, as set out above, is not always at work when it comes to writing history. Lategan, himself a reformed theologian, narrows in on South African church and theological historiography as an example of insufficient historical hermeneutics. Lategan emphasises the context in which the events of the past that we remember (what?) and the meaning which we attach to these events (how?) take place. Lategan takes a critical look at the work of Spoelstra⁵ who, as a church historian, uses the metaphor of a tree with different branches to describe the history of the church, but then sets out a work where the tree has barely more than two branches. From this and other examples, Lategan makes the observation that historiography can easily suffer from a lack of context and/or a mono-dimensional presentation. These two characteristics go hand in hand: on the one hand, the lack of context prevents all the facets of the event from becoming known; on the other hand the limited facets inevitably lead to a mono-dimensional understanding of the past. South African historiography developed in this way, and it is no surprise that it did. In fact, it is understandable and, in a certain sense, unavoidable. Nevertheless, it remains distressing.

⁵ Cf Spoelstra, C. 1906. *Bouwstoffen voor de geschiedenis der Nederduitsch-Gereformeerde Kerken in Zuid-Afrika Deel 1*. Amsterdam-Kaapstad: Hollandsch Afrikaansche Uitgevers Maatschappij.

We need to obtain an in-depth understanding of the nature and consequences of such an inadequate historiography.

To illustrate the consequences of a historiography that does not consider context, Lategan underlines the way in which the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck is described by church historians. In mainstream church history Van Riebeeck's arrival is consistently portrayed as a positive and an obvious event. Van Riebeeck's arrival marked the start of a new and important phase in South African history: civilisation and Christianity were brought to a primitive and haggard continent. One can say a 'new country was opened!' Lategan exclaims (Lategan, 2002: 271). And in this new country a people and a church were planted. Van Riebeeck himself came to personify a specific (and new) symbolic reality. But in this portrayal there is no consciousness that Van Riebeeck also represented another symbolic reality: one of avarice and displacement which symbolise the start of oppression and injustice. From another point of view Van Riebeeck and his followers did not occupy an empty country, but invaded the land, pastures and livelihoods of others.

It might be said that the concept of clashing symbolic realities is only a recent construction and one which comes with the benefit of hindsight. This is indeed true, but what should be added is that we cannot in fact expect anything different from a situation in which the discourse of the day was driven only by the dominant group. What is clear, however, is the fact that from the start, Van Riebeeck's arrival was experienced differently by the protagonists of both sides, and that non-dominant discourses were being kept off the agenda right from the beginning. It was only later that alternative experiences and interpretations of Van Riebeeck's arrival were aired.

What is furthermore noteworthy of this history, and highlighted by Lategan, is the absolute absence of any account of methodology or hermeneutical reflection on what the historian was busy with in his or her writing of history. Although sources are stated in detail, no methodology is presented. Here we take note of the gap that exists between facts and the conclusion which is drawn from them. The path from fact to conclusion is not a given, and a historian needs to give an account of the methodology used to determine this path. In the

examples⁶ of South African historiography that Lategan mentions, however, we are time and again confronted with a seamless transition from source to explanation. Using sources in this way suggests that they speak directly and for themselves.⁷ The way in which the historian describes reality is taken for granted – as if it is the only way. Description and reality are taken to be the same thing, without cognisance of the fact that the historian is actually creating a construct, and enforcing a narrative structure which might well have been different.

Lategan continues with an explication of the consequences this approach to historiography has for the reformed tradition in South Africa, consequences which, he argues, have implications for the church's 'understanding of its own calling in South Africa, and its ability or inability to function in a diversified ecclesiastical setup, in a pluralistic religious environment and in a multidimensional democratic dispensation' (270). He then suggests a way forward for church historiography that consists of a revaluation of the dominant interpretation of reformed history in South Africa. This revaluation begins with acknowledging the mono-dimensional nature of this interpretation, by way of listening to and respecting alternative voices. Furthermore, the way forward should entail recognition of the plurality of historical interpretations, integration with the wide-ranging theological discourse, parting with the urge to control and dominate, and recovering the age-old Christian and Reformed motive of liberation. Above all, it should acknowledge historiography as an undertaking in creating meaning from the perspective of the present focused on a better preparation for the future (275).

Lategan proposes what Robert Vosloo in his article *Herinnering, tradisie, teologie: Op weg na 'n verantwoordelike historiese hermeneutiek* (2009) (Memory, tradition, theology: en route to a responsible historical hermeneutic) calls, as the title suggests, *a responsible historical hermeneutic* (Vosloo, 2009: 281-282). Vosloo explains that such a hermeneutic

⁶ Lategan mentions the following examples of South African church history in his article: Botha, S.J. 1979. *Ds Marié Joseph Goddefroy 1848-1920. Sy lewe en betekenis*. Pretoria: HAUM; Gerdener, G.B.A. 1934. *Ons kerk in die Transgariep. Geskiedenis van die Ned Geref Kerke in Natal, Vrystaat en Transvaal*. Kaapstad: SA Bybelvereniging; Hanekom, T.N. 1951. *Die liberale rigting in Suid-Afrika. 'n Kerkhistoriese studie*. Stellenbosch: CSV; Moorrees, A. 1937. *Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika 1652-1873*. Kaapstad: SA Bybelvereniging; Spoelstra, C. *Ibid.*, p2; Van der Watt, P.B. 1976. *Die Loeddolff-saak en die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk 1862-1962*. Kaapstad: Tafelberg.

⁷ Although I will not give an analysis of the sources mentioned by Lategan, the perception of a lack of methodology remains.

takes seriously the duty to conduct history that is correct and just, and this implies that we should resist the temptation to 'interact with the past and with history in an uncritical and limiting manner' (281). Furthermore, we should guard against romanticising the past and against demonising the past. Vosloo sees the romanticising of the past, on the one hand, as painting a picture of the past that is rosier than it probably was; where memory becomes mere nostalgia and sentimentality. On the other hand, the demonising of the past entails the uncritical inclusion of our own stereotypes and prejudices that leads to oversimplified categories by which it is clear to distinguish between the heroes and saints, and the villains and heretics (281). By both the romanticising and the demonising of the past, we are unable to deal responsibly with the complexity and the ambiguity thereof.

Elsewhere Lategan (2007) argues that the historical incomprehension that Vosloo refers to above is, in essence, a structural deficit which we observe in Reformed hermeneutics and that it is, furthermore, one of the inevitable consequences of Reformed argumentation flowing from the concept of the infallibility of Scripture. Lategan is of the opinion that in praxis this implied the historical infallibility of the information contained in Scripture (Lategan, 2007: 159).

One illuminating example of the implications of such a structural deficit is the development of Reformed hermeneutics at the University of Stellenbosch. Lategan is of the opinion that the lasting legacy of this structural deficit 'was the systemic inability of Reformed hermeneutics (at Stellenbosch at least) to deal with the phenomenon of history' (160). That this had an immense influence on the theology practised here is clear from his following remark: 'Critical historical enquiry was blocked, the natural development of hermeneutics stultified (rendering it structurally dysfunctional) and the course of theology decisively steered in a different direction' (160).

4. Towards a responsible historical hermeneutic

Although Lategan sketches the negative development of Reformed hermeneutics he is of the opinion, an opinion I share, that the deficit does not need to remain a deficit. He states that certain '(i)mportant developments within historiography itself have opened up

promising possibilities' (2007: 168). I have suggested some of these developments already, but will give a more detailed discussion thereof, as proposed by Lategan.

The first development relates to the epistemological issues involved in historical research. Traditional historical research assumed that a 'representative picture of reality (existed) *behind* the sources' (168). It furthermore supposed that this picture could be attained. The reconstruction of the past was therefore the endeavour of history, disguising the fact that history is a *construct*.⁸ Lategan quotes Schröter to state that such an approach is built on the misconception that the historian can consider the past free of his/her own particular perspectives (168). Letting the past speak for itself was an attempt at historical objectivity, historical realism, and the development of history as an empirical science. Empirical sciences have specific objects which they study, and the object of history was assumed to be the past. We need to divert from such a picture idea of history.

The second development in historiography concerns the assumption of the objectivity of history. The phenomenon of history and the complexities of historical interpretation seemed to be more intricate than historicism could account for, and the object of history came to be defined anew. Lategan explains it as follows:

'The past is past, all that remain are memories or relics. But this also means that not all that happened is history. The great bulk of what occurred yesterday is already forgotten and gone; only what is deemed to be important or meaningful is retained. Even more there are no such things as *bruta facta*. Facts are never without some form of interpretation' (169).

Lategan goes so far as to say that the essence of history is not its critical dimension but its interpretive ability.

This brings us to the third major development in historiography. If history is interpretive remembrance then we need a mode in which this interpretation can take place and be conveyed. The preferred mode is the historical narrative. We need to note, however, that the narrative mode is not merely a vehicle for the presentation of truths, but that the narrative is in itself the act through which relationships of meaning are created between different facts of the past. Without the narrative there would be no historical contexts or causal relationships between events. Inscripturation (the moment of inscription of history)

⁸ The distinction between history as a construct and history as a reconstruction is perceived as somewhat of a forced one. For the purpose of emphasising the difference between the "past as it happened" and "history as it is written" it is, however, a useful distinction.

is therefore not a process which follows the endeavour of history, but a 'constitutive part of the epistemological process itself' (170).

The fourth and final historiographical development follows from all those mentioned above. It is the realisation that history is a sense-making activity which takes place in both the act of historiography and inscripturation.⁹ Lategan understands these acts as reality-related procedures that take facticity seriously, but insists that meaning is never intrinsic to facts, and is only generated through the creating of links and relationships.

Up to this point we have briefly followed the trail of historiography in the South African Reformed tradition, which is linked to the phenomenon of history as it developed in Western thought and as it is imbedded in the Reformed tradition which influenced theology worldwide over the last five centuries, and continues to do so. On the one hand we have discussed the deficit regarding historical hermeneutics which exists in the Reformed tradition, and on the other hand the necessity of a responsible historical hermeneutic. Although the venture towards a responsible historical hermeneutic is of immense importance to theology, it is not merely a theological endeavour, but one which should be approached in conversation with the social sciences. Furthermore, it is imperative that we take note of the culture of historical amnesia and harmful memory in which we live when we embark upon an undertaking like this. History is not something to be praised without (also) being critical thereof.

In the introduction to his magisterial work *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004), the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur states that he continues 'to be troubled by the unsettling spectacle offered by an excess of memory here, and an excess of forgetting elsewhere, to say nothing of the influence of commemorations and abuses of memory – and of forgetting' (2004: xv). Vosloo, in an essay titled '*Quo Vadis* Church History? Some theses on the Future of Church History as an Academic Theological Discipline' (2009), adds that historical amnesia and an unhealthy loss of memory is a well-known trend in the world in which we live, but so too are abuses of memory and history that serve harmful ideologically-driven projects of identity construction (Vosloo, 2009: 56). These remarks indicate why the questions of Lategan posed

⁹ Here Lategan simplistically explains historiography as history making and inscripturation as text making (Lategan, 2007: 171). We will later see that Paul Ricoeur does not adhere to such a separation.

above become particularly important in a culture such as our own. In a time of excessive memory and excessive forgetting it is indeed necessary to ask: *what* do we remember, and *how* and *why* do we construct history?

These questions were of critical importance to the Faculty of Theology of Stellenbosch in 2009 as 150 years of theology were remembered. Much emphasis was placed on *what* we remember and on *how* we construct a history of the past 150 years. In the process we have realised that there is a continuity but also a discontinuity between us and the past; that our past is one characterised by exclusion and that it is therefore important to 'embody an ethics of memory and history that will strengthen excluded voices' (Vosloo, 2009: 56); that it is important to note that when we do history, we are confronted with both shared and dividing pasts, and that the interwovenness of these pasts needs to be facilitated by talking to each other; and that whilst doing all of this we are imbedded in a tradition that asks us to engage with it dynamically and imaginatively. These are suggestions made by Robert Vosloo en route to a responsible historical hermeneutic. It is evident that responsible historical hermeneutics are no mere luxury, but something which we are compelled to seek if we want to make sense of our past together, and even more so if we are convinced that history is aimed at life. Remembering is not only something done at Stellenbosch in 2009, but is a process which takes place everywhere and at all times. As Reformed South African Christians, we have to take special care and effort to remember and to contribute to the ways in which history is created. Vosloo's suggestions of a responsible historical hermeneutic are good guidelines to use as we set out on this task, but they also alert us to the considerable work that still needs to be done in this regard.

5. The promise of Paul Ricoeur's thought for a responsible historical hermeneutic

This study aims to contribute to the development of responsible historical hermeneutics by focusing on the contributions made to this field by adherents outside the direct field of theology, but who, nevertheless, have a direct contribution to make to the endeavour of Reformed theology in dealing responsibly with the past. One such an adherent is the French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur. Although Ricoeur's work covers topics ranging from religion,

myth, and language to social theory and ideology, literature, historiography, and psychoanalysis, I will specifically focus on the magisterial work published at the end of his life, *Mémoire, L'histoire, L'oubli* (2000).¹⁰ This work encompasses multiple disciplines: history, psychology, philosophy, literary theory, cognitive science, sociology, legal thought, and theology; and is therefore a rich source in an undertaking, such as this one, concerned with hermeneutics.

In a review essay of Ricoeur's work, Hayden White states that Ricoeur spent a remarkable amount of effort and labour on trying to transform "history" into a master-discipline. He was convinced that, if properly understood, history 'could provide answers to the great existential questions raised by what (Ricoeur) calls "our" modernity' (White, 2007: 234).

These great existential questions remain questions with which we have to deal in this day and age, and also within the Reformed tradition. Ricoeur's use of the concepts memory, history, and forgetting is of particular importance in an attempt to answer these questions. Henceforth, I will discuss these concepts in an attempt to show why it is important for us to deal with them in our endeavour for a responsible historical hermeneutic, and consequently to show why it is important to take note of this work of Ricoeur.

5.1. Memory

Memory is nothing alien to us. We all have memories of many things: we have memories of last night, we have memories of our graduation, we have memories of good times spent with close friends, we have memories of our childhood, we have memories of things learnt at school, and we have memories of skills acquired. For Ricoeur, drawing on the tradition of Aristotle's philosophy, there is one very prominent characteristic of memory: "memory is of the past." Memories are not simply about things, places, people, and events – the memories that we have are situated within a timeframe. We can say that things of the past occur in a specific order – some things earlier and other things later. Furthermore, Ricoeur asks two very important questions with regards to memory: memories of what? And, whose memory is it? Focusing on the first question, we get to the heart of Ricoeur's concern. When he asks about the "*what*" of memory he suggests that there is a difference between the thing that is

¹⁰ I will make use of the English translation by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004).

remembered, and the memory of that thing. For Ricoeur, this time drawing on Plato, the problem is the present representation of an absent thing. As Charles Reagan (2005: 310) explains it, 'the object of the representation no longer exists, but the representation is in the present.' In other words, the thing that we remember is long gone, but what we have is the memory of that thing. The important point, however, is that the thing that we remember and our memory of that thing are not the same thing. The one is a representation of the other.

Flowing from this problematic of the representation of an absent thing is the age-old entanglement of memory and imagination. Our memory, which is the representation of the absent thing, is portrayed in the form of an image. It is not the real thing, but the image of it which the mind creates. How do we distinguish memory from imagination then? Our imagination is nothing else than images created by the mind. We may argue that memory pertains to the "world of experience" and imagination to the "world of fantasy," but this does not solve the problem whatsoever. If an image/(re)presentation is all we have, the question is how we can discern whether this image is an image from the "world of experience" or an image from the "world of fantasy." What becomes pertinent at this point to the conversation about memory, then, is whether the thing to which the image refers is a true thing or an imagined thing. Truthfulness is the criteria according to which we distinguish between memory and imagination. Memory is a search for truth.

From the outset of the discussion, Ricoeur separates himself from other scholars of the phenomenology of memory by emphasizing that his focus is on the capabilities of memory. Ricoeur stresses that we have memory – we are capable of remembering. The failure and malfunctioning of memory is a much discussed phenomena, and many other scholars start their investigation at this point. Ricoeur, however, accentuates time and again 'that we have no other resource, concerning our reference to the past, except memory itself' (Ricoeur, 2004: 21).

We can thus say that Ricoeur believes in the uses of memory – memory is our resource to the past. However, in much the same way as Nietzsche suggests in the title of his essay *On the Utility and Liability of History for Life* (1874), which will be discussed in more detail later, Ricoeur is deeply aware of the ambiguous nature of memory. He gives a long and insightful

explication of the abuses of memory under three main headings: blocked memory (a psychological phenomenon caused by wounded memory), manipulated memory (instructed memory serving a specific cause or ideology), and abusively commanded memory (when people, very often children, recite official histories).

Consequently we can see that our acquaintance with memory should not make us ignorant of the complexity thereof. The truthfulness of memory can be jeopardised by the entanglement of memory and imagination (whereby we cannot discern between truth and fantasy) and by various abuses of memory.

5.2. History

In the above explication of memory, we have become aware of the fact that memory is fragile and vulnerable. Yet, what we should keep in the not too distant back of our minds is Ricoeur's assertion that memory is our only resource concerning the past. This necessitates the relation between memory and history. However, the aforementioned complexities of memory should never leave our focus in the ongoing discussion on history. Memory is and remains a complex phenomenon.

Ricoeur divides his study of history into three parts: the documentary phase, the explanation/understanding phase, and the representative phase. The documentary phase is the constituting of archives based on the declarations of eyewitnesses. We need such an archive for the concept of "documentary proof." In other words: the proof that is in documents and on which we draw to build our arguments and our history is based on nothing else than the testimonies of eyewitnesses. The explanation/understanding phase has to do with the connection between the question "why?" posed at the archive and the responding answer "because." Why did things happen like this and not otherwise? The final phase of representation refers to the written or literary forms in which the above mentioned is offered to the readers of history. Ricoeur describes the relation between the three phases as follow: 'no one consults an archive apart from some project of explanation, without some hypothesis for understanding. And no one undertakes to explain a course of events without making use of some express literary form of a narrative, rhetorical, or imaginative character' (137).

In the discussion on memory, the remark was made that memory is not a presentation of the past, but a representation. Conversely, we cannot submit history to this same statement. With regards to history we can say, based on Ricoeur's comment that we approach the archive with an hypothesis, that history is never a reconstruction of the past, but a new construct altogether. It may be shaped and influenced by the past, but the past, as argued earlier at the hand of Lategan, never dictates history. The past is gone for good; yet we cannot make the same claim with regards to history: history is never a closed or finished project.

5.3. Forgetting

In the narrative of theological training at Stellenbosch, as recorded in the publication *Teologie Stellenbosch 150+*, Elna Mouton remarks that the critical question to ask in this year of celebration is '(w)hat do we see, where do we stand when we see this, and on what do we focus in this time of remembrance? ('Die kritiese vraag is: Wat sien ons, van waar sien ons, en waarop fokus ons in hierdie onthoutyd?') (Mouton in Coertzen, 2009: 156). The scope of this question thoroughly takes the complexity of memory and history into account. Looking at these 200+ pages of history of the past 150 years, one becomes aware of the ambiguous nature of the past which this publication undertakes to portray, but one also becomes aware of the ambiguity of celebrations of this past. Acknowledging the importance of Mouton's question, I think we are obliged to ask another question; better yet, we need to see the twofold nature of her question: What do we fail to see? Where are we not standing? What falls beyond our focus? In short, in this time of remembering, what are we forgetting?

Ricoeur himself is very sceptical of the practice of commemoration – the official celebration of big and important dates and events. To use the words of Reagan in his reflection on Ricoeur, 'if there is an official, authorised, commemorated history, there is also an official forgetting of those forbidden things about which one does not have the right to remember (Reagan, 2005: 314). In this context Ricoeur speaks of the abuses of forgetting (which he opposes to the abuses of memory). Ricoeur is critical of official history because he is aware of the obsession with commemoration that is present in our time – a commemorative obsession which disconnects us from the responsibility to remember. When we build places of commemoration and memorial monuments, we feel content with ourselves, as if we have

taken up our responsibility, and therefore life (as usual) may continue. Official commemoration is not, however, a substitute for remembering or for history – for when we remember justly, and when we struggle to make sense of the past in doing history, our lives are altered, the worlds in which we live change, and the life that proceeds is never the same again.

When we ask ourselves the question of forgetting in the face of events of commemoration (like 2009 at Stellenbosch University's Faculty of Theology), we acknowledge that 'forgetting is the emblem of the vulnerability of the historical condition taken as a whole' (Ricoeur, 2004: 289). We acknowledge that our ability to remember is also an inability to remember; we acknowledge that in order to remember anything we necessarily forget many other things. Forgetting, as the attack on the reliability of memory, makes our efforts of remembering humble; it forces us to revisit the history that we write because history is always history in the making.

Despite the importance of memory and history, Ricoeur argues that there must be limits to remembering. We are historical beings and this implies that the past endures even when it does not stand out distinctly as a memory. Ricoeur courageously calls for a reserve of forgetting, which, he states, is implicit in the phenomenon of recognition – there are some memories that are neither conscious, nor effaced. Nevertheless, we should guard against the blocked or manipulated memory and forgetting that, according to Ricoeur, is very often present in "official" histories. Memory and forgetting that serve any political ideals, like the institution of amnesty (described by Ricoeur as officially commanded forgetting), are very often in service to a specific ideology; we should not be uncritical thereof.

At the end of his work, Ricoeur surprisingly turns to forgiving, which for him means the unbinding of the agent from his act and therefore the enabling of a new beginning. This holds sway with Ricoeur's admonition that we should do justice to the dead and care about the past without being determined or crushed by it.

6. Ricoeur and theology

During the whole of *Memory, History, Forgetting* Ricoeur is utterly concerned with the truthfulness of history. He gives detailed discussions and explications of the complexity of

the representation of the past and the importance of it being truthful. However, it is important to note that although Ricoeur is aware of the vulnerability of memory, he chooses in favour of an approach to memory that emphasises its capability. We have memories; we can remember. Ricoeur helps us to get away from the concern for a picture theory of history writing – that is, the aim of depicting everything precisely as it happened – and helps us ask instead: why do we write history? What do we want to do with it? Marshall states that history is not a collection of facts but a testimony. ‘The truth history calls us to is faithfulness to the past, and that is never a given but rather a wish, a task, and a responsibility’ (Marshall, 2007: 375).

Ricoeur, despite his religious interests, does not address the relation between Christian theology and history in his work. Marshall is of the opinion that he may have felt that such an engagement might, paradoxically, narrow his focus while enormously expanding his task. He then speaks of his hope that ‘someone who has fully absorbed his (Ricoeur’s) thinking will extend it in an explicitly Christian reflection on history – and on the history at the core of Christianity.’ This hope of Marshall I regard as a challenge and I, in turn, hope to contribute to it in this study. Although I can surely not claim to have ‘fully absorbed’ Ricoeur’s thinking, and do not aim here to deliver a comprehensive ‘Christian reflection on history,’ I am of the opinion that Ricoeur’s work is significant to our undertaking to bring about a responsible historical hermeneutic, and that he is an illuminating and informative resource in the challenge of the historical deficit that we face as South African Reformed Christians. Furthermore, I agree with Marshall’s assertion that although Ricoeur does not speak directly or exclusively to theology, the Christian religion, being a religion where remembrance is taken to be essential, contributes important perspectives in the endeavour to represent the past faithfully (Marshall, 2007: 375).

Up to this point I have outlined the context from which I will approach this study. The historical deficit facing the Christian Reformed tradition in South Africa is one that poses many challenges to us in a time when the notion of a shared past is not something we can come to grips with; a time in which the trauma and pain of the past is still alive and well – paradoxical as this may sound; a time where the stumbling blocks to reconciliation and justice are real and daunting; a time where the future which we built is uncritically being

determined by the past which we never want to relive again. In a time like this, a responsible historical hermeneutic should be sought after.

In this study I will aim to take up the challenges posed by the representation of the past in church and theological historiography, as well as the challenge posed by Marshall regarding Ricoeur as a rich hermeneutical resource. I will set out on this endeavour by first briefly sketching Ricoeur's work. I call this Ricoeur's intellectual biography (chapter 2), as it is an attempt at giving an account of his intellectual life – albeit it an account that places the focus on my argument. In chapter 3 I deal with Ricoeur's work, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, and propose an overview of this magisterial work and the most prominent themes dealt within it. Chapter 4 is a critical engagement with Ricoeur's *Memory, History, Forgetting*, but also an attempt at stimulating a conversation between Ricoeur and the South African Reformed tradition to which I belong. I am aware of Ricoeur being a philosopher, and of the fact that the theological themes implicit in his work are often only suggestive in nature. I will aim at dealing with them accordingly, but nevertheless suggest further challenges that Ricoeur's work may pose to reformed theologians making work of hermeneutics.

CHAPTER 2

RICOEUR'S INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY

1. Introduction

The name Paul Ricoeur is well-known in the French intellectual scene among other imposing figures such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Gabriel Marcel, Jacques Maritain, Raymond Aron, Albert Camus, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Louis Althusser, Algirdas Julien Greimas, Emmanuel Levinas, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Fernand Braudel, Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida. There is not one of these figures whom Ricoeur did not engage during his lifetime.¹¹ Furthermore, he outlived them all. He was known as an 'indefatigable thinker and writer, a witty and engaging lecturer, a generous mentor, and a critic' (White, 2007: 251). His death in May 2005 signified the end of a philosophical career of which the importance and impact are still to be fully discovered – and therefore his life and work certainly leave a legacy that is destined to remain.

As one of the most challenging, enduring, and responsive thinkers of the twentieth century, Ricoeur reflected on all the major issues in the human sciences: 'from religion, myth, and language to social theory and ideology, literature, historiography, and psychoanalysis – and always in the interest of community and humaneness' (White, 2007: 251). In a book review, Donald G. Marshall describes him as an intellectual who addressed 'problems we really have – the nature of evil, the stories interwoven through our lives, the self and its relation to others, justice, and ultimately our relation to the past' (Marshall, 2007: 373). He adds that as Ricoeur worked to clarify the concerns of life, he never did so 'as though they could be made to disappear, but so that they pinch less hard' (373).

In the introduction to his book, *On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva* (2004), Richard Kearney explains why this title is appropriate for a book on the work of this renowned philosopher. Kearney, who was a student and friend of Ricoeur, tells that Ricoeur's office and library, where he often visited him, was furnished by hosts of owls. Being well-

¹¹ It is an intriguing question why Ricoeur did not engage the prominent women intellectuals of his time at all. Among others would be Simone de Beauvoir, Nathalie Sarraute, Céline Le Boeuf, Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, Sarah Kofman, and Luce Irigaray.

acquainted with Ricoeur's work, Kearney describes him as 'the living epitome of the Owl of Minerva' (Kearney, 2004: 9). Ricoeur is known for his preference of the long route over short cuts that give easy answers, and his work clearly speaks of this preference. Before writing a book or an essay, Ricoeur spared no pains to 'first experience and question deeply what it was he was writing about. He, like the Owl of Wisdom in Hegel's famous example, only takes flight at dusk when he has fully attended to what transpired (as both action and suffering) during the long day's journey' (Kearney, 2004: 9).

Ricoeur published more than thirty major works, ranging from existentialism and phenomenology to psychoanalysis, politics, religion, historiography and the theory of language (Kearney, 2004: 1). One may in fact ask, with Clark, 'on what major intellectual issues of the past [60] years Ricoeur has not written with distinction' (Clark, 1990: 2). The wide range of themes covered by Ricoeur in the course of his lifetime are characterised by his dialectic style of describing two apparently irreconcilable positions and then finding a way to mediate them (Reagan, 1978: vii).

Despite his overwhelming publication record, Ricoeur's work does not add up to anything like "Ricoeurism" or any specific doctrine or position. His focus seems not to have been on systematic solutions, but rather on intrinsically incomplete clarifications. This does not mean that he was an eclectic or indecisive thinker, or one-sided and dogmatic, but it is an indication of his vast appetite for thinking.

What follows is an overview of Ricoeur's intellectual life and the various areas in which he did groundbreaking work. Although his life's work covers a range of topics, it does not only consist of intellectual negotiations between competing schools of thought; he also significantly developed his own brand of philosophical hermeneutics. Surprisingly, his work is characterised by proclaimed rationalism and overt theological commitment, which seems to distance him from Barth, Derrida and Foucault (Clark, 1990: 2). Furthermore, his work is firmly grounded in his heightened sense of his role as a citizen, and his fervour for one's obligation to one's community (White, 2007: 251).

2. Ricoeur's early years

In *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* (Hahn, 1995) Ricoeur writes his own extensive intellectual autobiography in which he tells the story of his first encounter with philosophy (Hahn, 1995: 3-4). In the academic year of 1929-30 at the age of seventeen he, for the first time, found himself in a philosophy class during the final year of high school. He explains the manner of teaching that he encountered here as something profoundly different from anything he had experienced before. Although the intellectual figures studied were not new to him, he encountered the deep-seated reasons for their conception of things for the very first time. 'The art of disputing the question' by which he was confronted, he writes, was utterly enchanting (4). His teacher, Roland Dalbiez, was the first French philosopher to write on Freud and psychoanalysis – a topic in which Ricoeur himself became deeply interested during the course of his career. Ricoeur's concern with integrating the dimension of the unconscious and the psychoanalytic viewpoint is evident as early as his first substantial philosophical work, *The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (1950), in which he proposes an examination of the "absolute involuntary." He furthermore ascribes the 'resistance which he opposed to the claim to immediacy, adequation, and apodicticity made by the Cartesian cogito and the Kantian "I think"' to his first teacher's naturalistic realism which placed him directly alongside Aristotle and not on the side of Descartes and Kant (4). We will subsequently see that his reflection on Freud is also integrated into his work on memory, history and forgetting.¹²

Above all, Ricoeur says, he owes to Roland Dalbiez the manner in which he (Ricoeur) devoted his entire life to philosophy. He recalls his vivid memory of the advice that Dalbiez gave them upon leaving his class:

'[H]e goaded us to be intrepid and to maintain our integrity. When a problem troubles you, causes you anguish, frightens you, he would say to us, don't try to get around it, face up to it. I do not know to what extent I have been faithful to this precept; I can only say that I have never forgotten it' (4).

Ricoeur describes himself as having a particularly receptive ear to a rule such as this. He was a good student, with a curious and unsettled mind brought about by his precocious love of books and the general circumstances of his upbringing. Born in Valence, France, on 27

¹² Cf. Ricoeur, 2004: 69-80.

February 1913, he was brought up in the minority tradition of the Protestant Huguenots by his paternal grandparents, his sister Alice, who was slightly older than him, and his unmarried aunt. His Protestant heritage and intellectual formation caused him internal conflicts that contributed greatly to his general unsettledness. Consequently he wrote a master's thesis during the 1933-1934 academic year on *The Problem of God in Lachelier and Lagneau* by which he was initiated into the tradition of French reflexive philosophy.¹³ He spent the next year, 1934-35, in Paris at the Sorbonne where he studied Gabriel Marcel and Edmund Husserl. Here he was introduced to the method, outlined by Marcel, called "secondary reflection" that consisted of a 'second-order grasp of experiences that "primary reflection," reputed to be reductive and objectifying, was held to obliterate and rob of their original, affirmative power' (7). This second-order reflection became prominent in much of Ricoeur's work.

In 1935 Ricoeur finished his university studies, shortly after which he married a childhood friend with whom he would have five children. At that time he taught philosophy in the high schools of Colmar and Lorient, studied German, and continued to read Heidegger – this time the masterwork, *Sein und Zeit*. By the end of the summer of that year, the Second World War broke out and Ricoeur moved from drafted civilian to combatant to vanquished combatant, and finally to imprisoned officer in different camps in Pomerania, on the south shore of the Baltic Sea. Ricoeur tells about this time of his life (1940 to 1945) as being one of extraordinary human experiences: 'daily life, shared interminably with thousands of others, the cultivation of intense friendships, the regular rhythm of improvised instruction, of uninterrupted stretches of reading books available in the camp' (9). He unexpectedly depicts his years of captivity as 'extraordinarily fruitful from a human as well as from an intellectual standpoint' (10).

It was in these years of captivity that he, together with Mikel Dufrenne, came to read Karl Jaspers - primarily the three volumes of his *Philosophy* (1932) - and, furthermore, continued studying the work of Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl, Immanuel Kant, G.W.F. Hegel, Rudolf Bultmann, and Karl Barth. Among his first publications that established him as a leading expert on phenomenology are *Karl Jaspers et la philosophie de l'existence* (co-authored with Mikel Dufrenne in 1947 upon their return from captivity), *Gabriel Marcel et*

¹³ Ricoeur obtained both his undergraduate and master's degree from the University of Rennes.

Karl Jaspers: philosophie du mystère et philosophie du paradoxe (1948), and his translation and authoritative commentary on Husserl's *Ideen* that was the first volume in Sartre's and Merleau-Ponty's *Bibliothèque de philosophie* (1950) (Clark, 1990: 2).

During his life, Ricoeur taught philosophy at various schools and institutes. Early in his life he was a teacher at a number of high schools, amongst others in Saint-Brieux, Colmar and Lorient and the Cevenol school that sheltered many Jewish children (Hahn, 1995: 9). Upon the completion of his doctoral dissertation in 1948 he was appointed to the University of Strasbourg as lecturer specializing in the history of philosophy, where he taught for ten years (1948-57). These years he describes as the happiest years of his university career (14). Between 1956 and 1967 he spent time at the Sorbonne in Paris, where he taught general philosophy to students of different levels – introductory, undergraduate, and candidates for master's and doctoral degrees. Together with Jacques Derrida he also taught a seminar in phenomenology where he tried out various themes of his own research (25). The institution, however, was increasingly becoming incapable of accommodating the vast number of students, and in 1967 he left the Sorbonne to participate in the creation of a new university located in Nanterre, a suburb to the west of Paris. There he accepted his election to the office of Dean of the School of Letters. However, the student uprisings in May 1968 became rife in Nanterre too, and Ricoeur was ridiculed as an "old clown" and a tool of the French government despite his strong criticism of French imperialism. In April 1970 he resigned from this position to accept an invitation from the Catholic University of Louvain to teach in the Department of Philosophy, where he spent three satisfying years. After this he returned to Nanterre which, in the meantime, had become the University of Paris. In 1980 he completed his university career there. Ricoeur, furthermore, taught at various universities in Canada and the United States, including the University of Chicago where he was a permanent faculty member with appointments in the Divinity School, the Department of Philosophy and the Committee on Social Thought (Ricoeur, 1995: 6).

In the remainder of this chapter I will attempt to give a broad overview of Ricoeur's work at the hand of some of the most important themes encountered in his intellectual journey.

3. A hermeneutical phenomenology: between freedom and nature

In the 1940s and 1950s Ricoeur became particularly well known for his writings in existential phenomenology due to his translation and critique of Husserl's thought (Ricoeur, 1995: 3). 'He agrees with Husserl that the value of phenomenological method lies in its description of consciousness to be a consciousness *of* something, a moving outside of oneself to the object or phenomenon intended' (3). This movement toward a "hermeneutical phenomenology" began in Ricoeur's series on the philosophy of the will. The first part consists of the volume *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (1950). Here Ricoeur utilizes the phenomenological method to describe the volitional and non-volitional structures of the will (3). He argues that human freedom depends on sustained negotiation with necessity, rather than on a transcendent choice, as was argued by Sartre. He hereby acknowledged and emphasised the affective and volitional spheres of human life and also the limits of human consciousness (Clark, 1990: 2). Furthermore, as in *The Symbolism of Evil* (1960), he critiques 'the idealist doctrine that the self is transparent to itself' (Kearney, 2004: 2). He asserts that the *cogito* is not self-founding and self-knowing, but that the shortest route from self to self is through the other; or to state it in Ricoeur's own words: "*to say self is not to say I.*" He hereby makes an argument for the hermeneutic self as being more than just an autonomous subject, and proposes the notion of *self-as-another*. Kearney explains this development as follows:

'In the most positive hermeneutic scenario, the self returns to itself after numerous hermeneutic detours through the language of others, to find itself enlarged and enriched by the journey. The Cartesian model of the *cogito* as "master and possessor" of meaning is henceforth radically subverted' (2004: 2).

Ricoeur thus moves beyond Descartes and Kant with regards to rationalism, and beyond Husserl and Heidegger concerning phenomenology. The latter is evident through Ricoeur's view that perception is always a matter of interpretation, as opposed to Husserl's view that meaning is located 'in the subject's intuition of the "things themselves"' (Kearney 2004: 2). Meaning is conveyed to us *indirectly* by means of a detour of signs. Furthermore, symbols possess a double meaning¹⁴ which compels us to think more in order to discover meaning.

¹⁴ Kearney describes the double meaning of symbols as follows: a primary meaning refers beyond itself to a second meaning which is never given immediately. (2004: 2)

Ricoeur's understanding of the concept of symbols is further developed in the second part of his series on the philosophy of the will, which consists of two volumes: *Fallible Man* and *Symbolism of Evil* (1960).

In *Fallible Man* the 'issue of human fallibility through the resources of transcendental reflection' is discussed (Clark, 1990: 3). What Ricoeur aimed to demonstrate was that evil was not 'one of the limit-situations implied by the finitude of a being submitted to the dialectic of acting and suffering, but a contingent structure, "historical"...' (Hahn, 1995: 15). Evil is possible because of the 'always already disproportion between freedom and finitude' that comprises a constitutional weakness (Ricoeur, 1995: 4). He proposed an understanding of evil that explained what "being evil" actually was, in opposition to a simple principle of fallibility. This endeavour compelled him to make methodological choices which contained the seed of what he would later call "the graft of hermeneutics onto phenomenology."

Ricoeur writes:

'In order to arrive at the concrete form of evil will, I had to introduce into the circle of reflection the long detour by way of the symbols and myths transmitted by great cultures. This decision involved a critical element as well as a prospective one. Speaking of the detour through symbols, I was questioning a presupposition common to Husserl and to Descartes, namely the immediateness, the transparency, the apodicticity of the *Cogito*. The subject... does not know itself directly but only through the signs deposited in memory and in imagination by the great literary tradition' (Hahn, 1995: 16).

An analysis of the concrete manifestation of fault in the human condition was deployed in *The Symbolism of Evil* (Ricoeur, 1995: 4). In this study the 'human experience of guilt, finitude and fallibility – as limits to our consciousness – finds expression in the encounter with the enigma of evil' (Kearney, 2004:2). The central question Ricoeur deals with here is "What is the meaning of human being?" (Ricoeur, 1995: 4). According to Kearney, Ricoeur answers this question by developing a hermeneutic of double meaning by interpreting the primary symbols of stain, guilt and sin, the secondary symbols of wandering, decline, fall and blindness, and the tertiary symbols of the servile will (2004: 2-3). Ricoeur concludes that to be human is to be estranged from oneself 'because all humans, though destined for fulfilment, are inevitably captive to an "adversary" greater than themselves' (Ricoeur, 1995: 4). Ricoeur argues that symbols should in themselves be understood as expressions containing double meanings, and to reach this meaning we have to engage in the

deciphering of symbols (Hahn, 1995: 17). He developed the adage to which he would return time and again: the symbol gives rise to thought, and thought returns to the symbol.

Ricoeur's early writings on the structure of the will all make the same claim:

'...human beings are tethered between freedom and nature, between the self-transcending powers of the imagination and the always limiting character of perspectival, fragmented experience. The possibility of an undivided self, the task of becoming a "whole soul," begins with reflective analysis on these two poles... Selfhood is a *task* to be performed, not a *given* that awaits passive reception by the subject' (Ricoeur, 1995: 3-4).

4. The hermeneutical turn

In the 1960s and 1970s Ricoeur systematically worked at a general theory of interpretation. Beyond his earlier concern with myth and symbol, he developed further theories of the imagination and the text in three books, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (1965), *The Rule of Metaphor* (1975), *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (1976), and three collections of essays, *History and Truth* (1965), *The Conflict of Interpretations* (1969), and *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: An Anthology of His Work* (1978) (Ricoeur, 1995: 6-7).

In Ricoeur's work we find a deep concern for the way in which (new) meaning(s) come(s) into being and how such meaning(s) reconfigure(s) the meaning(s) of the past. This question is fundamentally hermeneutic in nature, and based on the thesis that 'existence is itself a mode of interpretation' (Kearney, 2004: 1). Ricoeur's contribution to the field of hermeneutics is significant and boundless, as we will see during the course of this study. What distinguishes him from other hermeneutists, for example Heidegger, is the "long route" of multiple hermeneutic detours that continually brought him into dialogue with the human sciences. Abandoning Heidegger's "short route" to discover the meaning of Being through human existence, Ricoeur 'argued instead that the meaning of Being is always mediated through an endless process of interpretations – cultural, religious, political, historical and scientific' (1). Ricoeur's approach to hermeneutics can be defined as the "art of deciphering *indirect* meaning."

From his approach to hermeneutics he drew many of the topics that he subsequently studied and wrote on: hidden meanings as opposed to apparent meanings; the way in which existence arrives at expression and moves to reflection; the exploration of the significance of the symbolic works of culture; the becoming of the self by way of that which is outside of the self.

From his engagement with Freud it can be seen that Ricoeur's hermeneutics is not limited to readings of symbols and myths. In *Freud and Philosophy* Ricoeur agrees that unconscious drives and desires influence reflective consciousness and expose it to dimensions of meaning outside of itself (Kearney, 2004: 3); he called this "semantics of desire." Ricoeur takes a detour 'through psychoanalysis over the question of whether a restorative hermeneutics is possible after Freud's reconstruction of the human as a source of conflicted desires and unresolved forces' (Ricoeur, 1995: 7). In his earlier writings Ricoeur argued that the (human) subject has the ability to create a new identity by negotiating with 'self-generated figures of the imagination' (7). In *History and Truth* he even spoke of "redemption through imagination" and the human being acting "as a prophet of his own existence" (7). However, following Freud's argument on the imagination and on consciousness, he agreed that it is in fact a false consciousness that is at play – 'a projection of unconscious distortions and impulses' (7). The "wounded cogito" was hereby introduced into Ricoeur's thinking – a cogito that struggles with illusions of freedom and self-sufficiency. In true Ricoeurian fashion, however, he positioned Freud's origins of the subject in false consciousness against 'a similar projection of symbols and figures of a new humanity' (7).

Ricoeur argued that the imagination can create new modes of being in the world. To create these modes requires a continuous dialectic to be at work. In the collections of essays *The Conflict of Interpretations* (1969) Ricoeur looks into the 'long inter-subjective detour through the sedimented horizons of history and tradition' (Kearney, 2004: 4) to create such a dialectic. Clark states that Ricoeur manages to argue in 'an impressive variety of contexts, that the process of understanding involves a double movement of the recovery of meaning and of an exercise in demystification: opposing perspectives which complement each other in an open-ended and productive contest' (Clark, 1990: 3). Ricoeur argues that the short inter-subjective relation of the two speakers in conversation is 'invariably intertwined with

various long inter-subjective relations, mediated by various social institutions, groups, nations and cultural traditions' (Kearney, 2004: 4). Furthermore the text has a mediating function, implying that 'meaning survives the absence of the original author and addressee' (5) and the negotiation of meaning may and can take place outside of the original context. Meaning may thus be detached from its origin. Ricoeur calls this a "second-order reference" in front of the text. This "second-order reference" often gives rise to multiple and even conflicting readings.

The above mentioned constitutes what we may call a 'hermeneutic circle of historical intersubjectivity' that precludes the 'idealist claim to occupy an absolute or total standpoint' (Kearney, 2004: 5). Kearney explains it in a striking way: 'To interpret meaning is, for Ricoeur, to arrive in the middle of an exchange that has already begun and in which we seek to orient ourselves in order to make some new sense of it' (5). Any mode of being can never be the absolute or total mode of being. Furthermore, Kearney states that self-comprehension is not diminished by our traversal of the circle, but rather enhanced thereby. Hermeneutics should therefore acknowledge that interpretation is an ongoing process that cannot be encapsulated by a single vision. In this way hermeneutics empowers interpretation to inhabit new worlds. These new worlds become possible when other and new meanings are expected - meanings that transcend the familiar limits of subjective consciousness.

However, it is important to note that, regardless of his critical views on the subject, subjectivity continues to exist in Ricoeur's view of hermeneutics; but it is a self-as-another that is reached only after the detour of intersubjectivity. Ricoeur explains that 'the subjectivity of the reader is no more the master of the meaning of the text than the subjectivity of the author. The semantic autonomy of the text is the same in either contexts. Understanding herself, for the reader, is understanding herself before the text and receiving from it the conditions for a self other than the ego that initially comes to the reading' (Hahn, 1995: 37). This selfhood does not exist at the beginning of the hermeneutical circle, but only

at the end. In this way Ricoeur's hermeneutics is seen as a critique to both egology¹⁵ and ideology¹⁶.

By this time Ricoeur's phenomenology was broadened to such an extent that it took thorough cognisance of the problems of language and interpretation. This can be seen in the further expansion of Ricoeur's hermeneutical field, stimulated by his encounter with the structuralism of Saussure and Lévi-Strauss and the sciences of language of Greimas and Benveniste.

In these encounters the primacy of the subjective will is challenged by the hidden structures of language which operate independently and involuntarily. Language is an unconscious system of structures that lies deeper than the intentional subject. Already in various essays written shortly after his translation of Husserl's *Ideen*, and later collected under the title *À l'école de la phénoménologie* (1986), Ricoeur distanced himself 'from a self-consciousness that would be immediate, direct, and transparent to itself, and pleaded instead for the necessity of a detour by the signs and the works displayed in the cultural world' (Hahn, 1995: 19).

Facing the challenges that semiotics posed, Ricoeur became interested in the model of the text that extends interpretation to all phenomena of a textual order. This includes narratives and ideologies as discussed in the three volumes of *Time and Narrative* (1983-85), and in *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (1986). Ricoeur's well-known maxim encapsulates the new dialogue with human and social sciences that developed from this: "*to explain more is to understand better.*" Hereby the traditional bias of hermeneutical philosophy against "explanation" and in favour of "understanding" was redressed at last. His first effort in this direction dates back to 1970 and the publication of an essay in honour of Hans-Georg Gadamer, titled *What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding*. The text is portrayed as the appropriate level at which 'the dialectic between explanation and understanding is played out... (This dialectic) unfolding on the level of the text as the unit of discourse greater than the sentence, became the major concern of interpretation and constituted henceforth the theme and the primary stakes of hermeneutics' (Hahn, 1995: 30).

¹⁵ Kearney describes egology as the view that the self is the origin of the self.

¹⁶ Kearney understands ideology as the view that understanding is a matter of false consciousness.

Ricoeur refused to present the explanation-understanding pair in the form of an either/or alternative, and argued incessantly that the one is not complete without the other. However, he took great effort in illustrating the differences between the two, which can be reduced to three criteria (Hahn, 1995: 30): 1) The observation of facts in the natural sciences corresponded on the side of the human sciences to the appropriation of external signs, expressive of internal mental life. 2) To the objective, uninvolved attitude corresponded the transfer by empathy into a foreign life. 3) To the analytic examination of causal chains was opposed the apprehension of the cohesion of meaningful connections.

Here the model proposed in Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* was instructive, as it aimed at 'dissociating the systematic organization of linguistic ensembles from the subjective intentions ascribed to the speaking subject' (Hahn, 1995: 18). The move from "speech," seen as the immediate dialogue between speaker and listener, to "text," the mediated discourse, shows the distance that lies at the essence of meaning and therefore at the heart of the hermeneutical process. A hermeneutic conversation with the sciences is started in this way where scientific "explanation" and phenomenological "understanding" converse and converge (Kearney, 2004: 4).

Ricoeur's work is not only about semiological challenges and epistemology, but significantly points to something beyond the text. He calls this the "matter of the text." The ultimate horizon of his work is the horizon of being – a land that is promised but never occupied. The relation between text and being is constituted by the fact that the world of being is not merely represented by the text, but in fact disclosed by the text. The role of text is important in this regard as it implies that meaning is 'no longer construed as an essence to be intuited (Husserl), nor as a transcendental condition of possibility to be reflected upon' (Kearney, 2004: 4). The text functions as intersubjective horizons of language and history as it breaks the circuit of internal reflections. In Ricoeur's words, "*meaning involves someone saying something to someone about something.*" This understanding of meaning acknowledges the particular contexts and presuppositions of the speaker and the reader respectively. Any specific conversation, where meaning is created and found, is determined by certain contextual values. Interpretation is, therefore, not an endeavour of the timeless reflective subject, but of 'language-using beings in a world with others' (Kearney, 2004: 4).

5. Rediscovering the role of narrative

In the above explication of Ricoeur's hermeneutical development we have traced the shift that took place from Ricoeur's earlier writings on myth and symbol, where hermeneutics was limited to discovering the hidden meanings in symbolic language, to an understanding of hermeneutics that is linked to the more general problem of written language and texts. Ricoeur's writings from the 1980s onwards signify a third development in his thinking that has to do with the challenge of narratology and deconstruction (Ricoeur, 1995: 10). These writings include the three volumes of *Time and Narrative* (1983-85), *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (1986), and *Oneself as Another* (1990). Collections of essays have been published as *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (1980), *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (1981), *From Text to Action* (1986), *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination* (1991), *Lectures* (3 volumes, 1991-1994), and *Figuring the Sacred* (1995).

In these works Ricoeur regards narrative as an important role-player in the formation of subjectivity. The connection between temporality and narrative (as can be seen in the three volumes of *Time and Narrative*) plays an important part in Ricoeur's later work. In the first volume of *Time and Narrative*, he states the following: 'Time becomes human time to the extent that it is organised after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience' (Ricoeur, 1995: 11). In his later work he argues that 'the desire to be, the task of existence, is inseparable from the scripting of an individual story that gathers together untold and sometimes repressed narrative fragments constitutive of personal identity' (11).

His earlier and later works are, nevertheless, coherent with each other. His earlier engagement with philosophers of language paved the way for the development of his narratology. Ricoeur's central claim with regards to the text is that it is itself a process of "semantic innovation," implying that meaning is configured at different levels through linguistic processes. It was in *The Rule of Metaphor* (1975) that Ricoeur first developed this notion. Regarding metaphor, new meaning is produced at the level of the sentence. However, the development of the notion of semantic innovation 'confirmed a hidden kinship with other forms of ordered creation, also of semantic origin, such as the production of plots on the level of narrative' (Hahn, 1995: 27). *The Rule of Metaphor* and the three

volumes of *Time and Narrative* are regarded by some as twin works dealing with semantic innovation. The former works with symbols and metaphors, the latter with plots. Concerning narrative, heterogeneous temporal elements are synthesised by means of emplotment, which Ricoeur relates to the schematising function of productive imagination. By means of plots, meaning is thus configured between unrelated and varying aspects.

In the first volume of *Time and Narrative* (1983) Ricoeur writes that emplotment 'engenders a mixed intelligibility between the theme of a story (its intellectual component) and the intuitive presentation of characters, events, circumstances and reversals of fortune that make up the denouement' (Kearney, 2004: 6). Neither the theme of the story nor the factors contributing to it is therefore fixed or given, but all of it is continuously schematised and synthesised.

Ricoeur also broadens his concept of text and plot by including what he calls social imaginary. This means that a text (through which meanings are configured and by which meanings are reconfigured) is not confined to texts signed by individual authors; the concept of text in fact includes a 'body of collective stories, histories and ideologies which informs our modes of socio-political action' (Kearney, 2004: 7). In short, texts as social imaginations include our lived reality. The dialectic which constitutes the social imagination is ideology and utopia. According to Kearney, Ricoeur views ideology as integratedness and a sense of sharing (such as shared identity), and utopia as the opposite of novelty, rupture and discontinuity (7). Again, the one cannot function without the other and the role of identification is just as important as that of disruption when it comes to the social imagination. 'Ideology as a symbolic confirmation of the past and utopia as a symbolic opening towards the future are... complementary. Cut off from one another, they run the risk of pathological extremes: ideology imprisoning us in reactionary conservatism, utopia sacrificing us to a schizophrenic image of an abstract future without the conditions for its realization' (7).

To combat this danger Ricoeur combines respect for tradition with critique of ideology, by drawing respectively on Gadamer and Habermas. With regards to tradition one should be sceptical of 'innocent obedience to the authority of inherited prejudice,' and concerning ideology one should be aware of the 'truth that critique is also a tradition' (Kearney, 2004:

7). Ricoeur names the most urgent hermeneutic task today as 'reanimating tradition and realizing utopia' (7).

Ricoeur identifies a hermeneutic dialectic constituted by tradition and innovation as a result of the schematising role of narrative. Each supplements the other and this implies that hermeneutics are not complete without tradition and innovation. Kearney explains it as follows: 'Tradition needs innovation in order to sustain itself as a living transmission of meaning capable of being reactivated in its inaugural moments, while innovation needs tradition in order to make sense as a form of expression governed by rules' (Kearney, 2004: 6). Here, as earlier, the hermeneutic circle is defined again by distantiation and belonging, novelty and familiarity, far and near.

The dialectic of innovation and tradition, furthermore, entails not only a process of configuration but also one of refiguration that entails a move from the text to the reader who acts in the world. As explained in *Du texte à l'action* (1986), the written narrative is completed by the reader who acts in the world. What the writer has configured in the text the reader refigures in the world of action. Ricoeur is convinced that 'discourse never exists simply for its own glory but that it attempts, in all its usages, to carry an experience to language, a manner of inhabiting and of being-in-the-world, which precedes it and demands to be said' (Hahn, 1995: 38). What *Time and Narrative* thus aims to portray is that 'narrative completes its course only in the experience of the reader, whose temporal experience it "refigures"' (40).

With the semantics of action entering the scene, the dialectic between explanation and understanding (as explicated in the previous section) was redefined to include more than simply the written text, but also the human action. Suddenly, under the aegis of the same dialectic, three problematics were grouped together: that of the text, that of action, and that of history (Hahn, 1995: 32). This was discussed in an essay published in 1977 under the title, *Explanation and Understanding. Concerning Some Notable Connections between the Theory of the Text, the Theory of Action, and the Theory of History*.

Ricoeur's continuous conversation with interlocutors such as structuralism, psychoanalysis, analytic philosophy, political theory, sociology, theology and the sciences of language is the most convincing argument in favour of the hermeneutics which he proposes. He thereby

acts upon his own belief and argument that meaning is never final or absolute, and therefore not a destination but a task in which we are ceaselessly involved. If hermeneutics is, as stated above, the deciphering of indirect meaning, it compels us to make an effort with both the hermeneutics of suspicion and affirmation. Kearney states that we 'can only recover our ontological desire to be authentically in a "second naïveté" by first interrogating ourselves as we exist outside of ourselves' (7). It is, furthermore, an actualisation of his hermeneutic maxim that "the shortest route from self to self is through the other." In order to discover the "us" that exists "outside of ourselves", as well as the "other" through which we are to encounter ourselves, we can do nothing else than, as Ricoeur, enter into a conversation with our interlocutors.

However, critique is not the only task of hermeneutics. Once we are stripped of our illusions, we are left with what Ricoeur calls a surplus of meaning which re-invites and re-ignites in us the desire-to-be (Kearney, 2004: 8). But, according to Kearney, this ontological affirmation is something that we can only hope for because hermeneutics is always a gamble. It is not something that we can acquire, but rather a task in which we should be forever willing to participate.

Furthermore, the finiteness of our being subjects us to the limits of the hermeneutic circle, and if we are not conscious of these limits we are prone to believe in the myth of absolute reason. The only way in which we can resist this myth is to partake in critical debates and detours and accept the inevitable creative conflict that interpretation presupposes. Because it is creative, it invites us to create – a theme that is to be found from the earliest to the latest of Ricoeur's work. This is also the case in *Oneself as Another* (1990).

Based on the Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh which he gave in 1986, this work developed in three different directions. The first was an integration of the various objectifying procedures concerning discourse and action into the reflexive operation. By objectification, Ricoeur guaranteed that the distinction between the immediate ego and the reflexive self were upheld (Hahn, 1995: 48-49). The second was with regards to the nature of the identity that could be assigned to a subject of discourse and of action. A clear distinction between the two avoided the confusion between an identity of sameness and an identity of selfhood. Ricoeur explains as follows:

‘The identity of sameness (seemed)... to suit the objective or objectivised features of the speaking and acting subject, while identity as selfhood (seemed)... better suited to characterising a subject capable of designating himself or herself as the author of words and actions, a non-substantial and non-immutable subject, yet nevertheless one responsible for his or her saying and doing’ (Hahn, 1995: 49).

This decomposing of identity forms the bridge between *Time and Narrative* and *Oneself as Another*. The third direction of inquiry was related to the idea of selfhood-identity mentioned above. Ricoeur argued that selfhood-identity was to assume, as a counterpart to the proud initiative that was the distinctive mark of a speaking, acting, and self-narrating subject, a component of passivity or of otherness. Ricoeur drew on the work of Jaspers and Marcel studied earlier regarding limit-situations and embodiment respectively. However, by that time his own idea of otherness has been largely enriched to include notions of other as possessing his or her own body, the other as another, the other as bearing another history than my own, the other as the conscience. With regards to the latter notion, Ricoeur succeeded in a remarkable way in completing the return of the self to itself. Nevertheless, it was “as another” that the self returned (Hahn, 1995: 49-50).

The poetics of creation developed in this work (*Oneself as Another*) are closely connected to an ethics of justice. The hermeneutic circle is thus also operative here, as it proposes the continuous movement back and forth between text and action. Ricoeur called this work his “little ethics” – ‘a discussion of how cultures seek to realise the Aristotelian goal of a good life with and for others in just institutions’ (Kearney, 2004: 8). Ricoeur explains that this three-cornered definition of ethics ‘unites the self in its original capacity of esteem to the other, made manifest by his face, and to the third party who is the bearer of rights on the juridical, social, and political plane’ (Hahn, 1995: 51-52). This ethics is regarded as practical, and Kearney states that the Greeks already honoured the conjunction of practical wisdom and creativity. He adds that ‘Ricoeur’s hermeneutics represents... one of the most significant contemporary realisations of this most ancient of philosophical tasks’ (Kearney, 2004: 8). Ricoeur comments on his ethical undertaking as follows:

‘(P)ractical wisdom (or the art of moral judgment in situation) appeared to me to be required by the singular nature of cases, by conflicts among duties, by the complexity of life in society where choice is more often between grey and grey than between black and white, and finally by those situations that I

call situations of distress, in which the choice is not between good and bad, but between bad and worse' (Hahn, 1995: 52).

6. Memory and mourning, melancholy and forgetting

In the final years of his life, which is also the time when he wrote *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Ricoeur devoted his time to the issues of loss and pardon, memory and mourning, melancholy and forgetfulness. These writings are in no way contradictory to or an abandonment of his earlier work; on the contrary, it is part of Ricoeur's 'ceaseless efforts to reconfigure our projects of creative hope in the shadow of the past – both individual and historical...' and his 'uncompromising commitment to a conflict of perspectives' (Kearney, 2004: 8). As Kearney concludes, '(h)ermeneutic enquiry is, for Ricoeur, an indispensable way of giving a future to the past' (8).

Kearney views *Memory, History, Forgetting* as a supplement to Ricoeur's great trilogy, *Time and Narrative*, and to *Oneself as Another*, which he regards as Ricoeur's autobiography because he had 'forgotten forgetting' (White, 2007: 233). Ricoeur was of the opinion that his reflections on history and historical writing had not done justice to memory and its relation to historical consciousness. His aim was therefore 'to show, after the manner of Kant, how history – demeaned by positivists, existentialists, analytical philosophers, and sceptics in general – was not only possible, but was also necessary to a properly human conception of our humanity, our identities as both individuals and members of communities, and our roles as good citizens of the polities to which we belonged' (233).

Ricoeur's constant concern with the relation between the past, the present and the future is evident in this work. He tries to show that the past has an impact on the present, that it can be responsibly remembered in the present, and that remembrance can, furthermore, be used to justify belief in a better future. Ricoeur felt the need to make a definite break with Hegel's philosophy of history because a different kind of history has developed since Hegel's time. What we deal with today is modernity-history. It is the history of the great crimes of the twentieth century. This age simultaneously suffers from too much history, and too little history. Nevertheless, Ricoeur was convinced that history should be developed to a master discipline – a discipline that can face up to the problems of modernity. 'It is memory after all that compels us to confront the enigma of how what is past can endure into the present

and, no matter how we might wish it, that refuses to go away on command but remains present to consciousness, even getting in the way of perception and pressing for attention however distracted we may be by current affairs' (White, 2007: 234).

* * * * *

Ricoeur's work has been translated into at least sixteen different languages, and scholars from as many as nineteen different languages engage with his work and publish accordingly. He holds various honorary degrees, which include degrees from the University of Chicago, 1967; Copenhagen, 1979; Buenos Aires, 1983; The New School for Social Research (NY), 1986; Goettingen (Germany), 1987; Institute Protestant de Théologie de Paris, 1988; Universidad Complutense, Madrid, 1993; University of Stellenbosch, 1993. Prestigious awards he has received include Hegel Preis, Stuttgartm 1985; Prix Nietzsche, Palermo, 1987; Prix Dante, Florence, 1988; Karl Jaspers Preis, Heidelberg, 1989; Leopold Lucas Preis, Tübingen, 1990; Grand Prix de l'Académie française pour la philosophie, 1991; Premium Caroli (Charles IV) Prague, 1993.

CHAPTER 3

MEMORY, HISTORY, FORGETTING: RICOEUR'S ARGUMENT

In the previous chapter (Ricoeur's intellectual biography) I aimed at sketching a brief background against which we can understand the main work of Ricoeur on which I focus in this study. *Memory, History, Forgetting* continues on the trajectory that Ricoeur followed in his other work, although he acknowledges that he had previously forgotten memory (and forgetting), and therefore takes a specific interest therein in this work. It is an unparalleled work which consists of three parts – each with an own theme and method. The first part – *On Memory and Recollection* – is a phenomenological discussion of memory; the second part – *History, Epistemology* – is devoted to an epistemological study of history; and finally *The Historical Condition* focuses on the hermeneutics of the historical condition. Although the different parts constitute distinctive areas of study, they deal consistently with a common problematic (Ricoeur refers to his work as a 'three-masted ship'). As Ricoeur himself states this problematic time and again: *the problematic of the representation of the past*.

In this chapter I will give a broad overview of Ricoeur's argument, highlighting the most important building blocks that he uses to construct this monumental work.

1. The Phenomenon of Memory

It is important to understand the significance of each of the three parts independently of the others, but also the interplay between them. The phenomenology addressed first mainly seeks to answer two questions: Of *what* are there memories? *Whose* memory is it? (Ricoeur, 2004:3). These questions are asked primarily in the spirit of Husserlian phenomenology. This means that the assumption which is made is that 'all consciousness is consciousness of something' (3). As indicated by these questions, and specifically the sequence they are asked in, what is argued for in this section is that we should ask "what is remembered?" before we ask "who remembers?" Only by asking the questions in this order are we able to construct a phenomenology of memory. Furthermore, if we consider the history of the notions of memory, we are met by two different concepts used by the Greeks: *mnēmē* and *anamnēsis*. The former refers to passive memory; memory as it pops into one's mind (associated with the question "What?"). The latter refers to the search of memory; recollection (associated with the question "How?"). Memory is hereby differentiated as cognitive and pragmatic.

1.1. Memory as a phenomenon in Western philosophy: the entanglement of memory and imagination

In order to answer the "what?" question regarding memory, it is important to be clear on the subject that is being questioned. In Western philosophy, memory and imagination have always been entangled, and it is exactly this entanglement that complicates the matter. The reason for the entanglement differs from philosopher to philosopher, as can be seen in the respective philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. For the sake of a phenomenology of memory it is important to uncouple the concepts of imagination and memory, but in order to do this we need to grasp and understand the problematic thereof.

Plato sees the past as *the present representation of an absent thing*. In his explication of the entanglement of memory and imagination, the concepts *eikōn* and *phantasma* are used. He uses three different arguments with complementing metaphors to make his argument: the

metaphor of a slab of wax on which an imprint is made; the metaphor of the dovecote; and the metaphor of the imprint/portrait which deals with the actual creation of an image.

The significance of the metaphor of the dovecote and the metaphor of the slab of wax is to show the distinction made between the passive use of memory (in the case of the imprint left by a seal on the wax) and the power or capacity of knowledge, specifically memory (in the case of the dovecote). To use the words of the metaphor: to hold a bird in one's hand is different from keeping it in a cage. In addition to this, the metaphor of the imprint/portrait raises the concern regarding faithful resemblance.

This leaves us with the following questions regarding memory and imagination: firstly, the object which is represented no longer exists, but we possess a representation thereof in the present. Where and what is the original deictic form that is represented? Can the original image be recovered? Secondly, what relation exists between the *eikōn* and the original image/mark? Plato discusses this within the framework of imitative arts, highlighting the distinction made between eikastic art and fantastic art. According to Ricoeur this is the 'starting point for a full recognition of the problematic at the centre of this study, namely, the truthful dimension of memory...' (12). "Trace" is the concept used to refer to the relation between the *eikōn* and the (original) mark. Ricoeur sets out three major uses of this concept: traces that are written on a material support, traces as affection-impression in the soul, and traces as corporeal, cerebral and cortical imprints.

In the philosophy of Aristotle, the important characteristic of memory is that *memory is of the past*; it is therefore directly opposed to the future and the present. He hereby emphasises the temporal aspect of the phenomena of memory. Memory is not only related to people, places, and things, but it entails the notions of before and after, earlier and later. It is exactly the notion of temporality in Aristotle's thinking about memory that 'assures the distinction in principle between memory and imagination' (18). For Aristotle memory is, furthermore, an affection. Quoting Aristotle, Ricoeur states that the problematic that this brings about is that 'one might be puzzled how, when the affection is present but the thing is absent, what is not present is ever remembered' (16). A new aporia thus arises: 'if this is the case... what is it that we remember? Is it the affection or the thing that produced it? If it is the affection, then it is not something absent one remembers; if it is the thing, then how,

while perceiving the impression, could we remember the absent thing that we are not at present perceiving?’ (17).

Aristotle distinguishes between the terms *mnēmē* and *anamnēsis* in his study of the phenomenon of memory to illuminate the problematic of the entanglement of memory and imagination. *Mnēmē* refers to a memory that arises spontaneously (simple evocation), while *anamnēsis* is the active searching of memory (the effort to recall).

Ricoeur is not the only philosopher proposing a phenomenological sketch of memory and therefore early on in his work he stipulates his point of departure by way of two remarks: firstly, this phenomenology of memory will focus on the capacities of memory, and not on its deficiencies, as is usually the case. Ricoeur is of the opinion ‘that we have no other resource, concerning our reference to the past, except memory itself... we have nothing better than memory to signify that something has taken place, has occurred, has happened *before* we declare that we remember it’ (21). For this very reason we should regard memory as a capability. Secondly, a distinction is made between ‘memory as intention’ and ‘memory as the thing intended.’ The former refers to memory in the singular; a capacity, an effectuation. The latter refers to memories in the plural: ‘we have memories’ (22). This distinction enables us to differentiate further between the “what?”, the “how?” and the “who?” of memory. We can in fact speak of the “memory of memories.” Our memory (the capacity to remember) brings memories (the things that we remember) to our mind. However, there is nothing obvious about this occurrence. We should ask ourselves why it is that we remember certain things, but we do not remember others. In Ricoeur’s words, there is a ‘privilege spontaneously accorded to events among all the “things” we remember’ (23) and this should not be taken for granted.

These remarks suggest the complexity of the phenomena with which we are dealing here. Ricoeur proposes a series of oppositional pairs for the sake of illumination. The first pair consists of *habit* and *memory*. Here Ricoeur draws on the work of Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (1950). The pair shows that memory can either be a habit (when we recite something that was learned by heart; reciting it means acting it out), or it can be a distinct recollection (characteristic of the memory of an event that is unable to occur again; this memory can be nothing else but a representation).

The second set of opposites is *evocation* and *search*. *Evocation*, on the one hand, can be linked to Aristotle's term *mnēmē*, and portrays the idea of the unexpected appearance of memory. *Anamnēsis* is reserved for *search*, on the other hand, and refers to the call for memory.

The third pair is *retention/primary memory* and *reproduction/secondary memory*. The main difference between the two can be summarised as follows: 'Reproduction assumes that the memory of a temporal object... has "disappeared" and that it comes back. Retention still hangs onto the perception of the moment. Secondary memory is no longer presentation at all; it is re-presentation' (35). Here we again see the difficulty of discerning memory from imagination entering the scene.

The fourth and final oppositional pair is *reflexivity* and *worldliness*. It illustrates that on the one hand, in remembering, one remembers oneself: one remembers seeing, experiencing, learning. This is what Ricoeur calls reflexivity. On the other hand, while remembering oneself, 'one also recalls the situation in the world in which one has seen, experienced, learned. This is called *worldliness*. These situations imply one's own body and the bodies of others, lived space, and, finally, the horizon of the world and worlds, within which something has occurred' (36). Although *reflexivity* and *worldliness* form an oppositional pair, they are also complementary to one another.

The issue of the entanglement of memory and imagination can be summarised as follows:

'(I)s a memory a sort of image, and if so, what sort? And if it should prove possible through appropriate eidetic analysis to account for the essential difference between images and memories, how could their interconnectedness, even their confusion, be explained not only on the level of language but on the level of actual experience: do we not speak of what we remember, even of memory as an image we have of the past?' (44).

The problem we face now is that of the disentanglement that has to be performed. We have memories which belong to the "world of experience" and imagination which belongs to the "worlds of fantasy." But how do we explain that memory and imagination share "images" as the only way of portraying themselves, yet the images of memory are not images of the unreal. When we recall a memory, we recall it in the form of an image, yet when we imagine a fantasy, our imagination is also in the form of an image. The question that lies behind all of

this confusion is one concerning the reliability of memory: How do we know that our memories are true? The posing of this question implies that a specific search for truth and a concern for the truth enfold the phenomenology of memory.

1.2. The uses and abuses of memory

The cognitive approach to memory followed up to this point is now supplemented with a practical approach. Memory is not only a passive experience (welcoming/receiving an image from the past as it arrives), but it is also a verb: remembering is something that can be exercised. It is for this reason that it was stated earlier that memory can and should be regarded not as a deficiency but as a capacity. However, inherent to the capacity of memory is the concern of truthfulness. The very fact that there is a “correct” way (a truthful manner) to exercise memory implies that an “incorrect” exercise of memory is also possible. Memory can be used, but it can also be abused. Abused memory is a threat to memory’s aim of truthfulness.

It is necessary to distinguish “memorisation” from “remembering” when speaking about the uses and abuses of memory. Remembering refers to the ‘return to awakened consciousness of an event recognised as having occurred before the moment when consciousness declares having experienced, perceived, learned it’ (58). Memorisation consists of learning different forms of knowledge that are fixed but remain open for easy actualisation. Memory that comes about by means of memorisation is what we call artificial memory. Memorisation is the mastery of a specific form of knowledge; but the idea of mastery includes manipulation. Learning, the basic form of memorisation, is directed by a certain curriculum: that which needs to be learned. However, the curriculum is determined by someone: ‘he or she determines the task, defines the criteria of success, organises punishment and rewards, and in this way, “conditions” the learning’ (59). Memorisation as such is not hereby disqualified. Indeed, there are many practices that depend on learning by heart – doctors, lawyers, scientists, engineers and teachers all rely on the knowledge they have acquired and that is kept in a place where it can be used when deemed necessary. Even forms of art, like dance, theatre and music, rely on the practice of memorisation.

However, the practice of memorisation is very often out of touch with the limits of memory, and the deficiencies thereof. Ricoeur calls this a twofold denial: the denial of 'forgetting' and the denial of 'being-affected' (66). In the tradition of the *ars memoriae* (the art of memory), of which Ricoeur gives a close explanation¹⁷, the problem is that the imagination is 'freed from its service to the past' (66). For Ricoeur it is exactly the connectedness to the past that constitutes the limit of memory. Taking into consideration the capabilities as well as the deficiencies of memorisation, what is thus being argued for is a 'measured use of memorisation' (66). But, as Ricoeur stresses, a measured use of memorisation includes also a measured use of forgetting.

Opposed to artificial memory is natural memory. I will mainly focus on the abuses of natural memory as it manifests in blocked memory (the pathological-therapeutic level), manipulated memory (the practical level), and forced memory (the ethico-political level).

With regards to the pathological-therapeutic level where we find blocked memory, Ricoeur draws on two essays of Freud, *Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through* (1914), and *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), in discussing this phenomenon. He also refers to blocked memory as wounded or sick memory. When memories are repressed, a resistance develops due to the repression. The resistance is then manifested as a "compulsion to repeat." Because the memory is repressed, the memory is acted out without the knowledge of the person. As suggested by the title of the first essay, the way to deal with repressed memories and the compulsion to repetition which they create, is by working through these memories. Working through becomes the work of remembering. In the second essay Freud compares the work of mourning to the work of remembering. Ricoeur quotes from Freud: 'what makes mourning a normal, albeit painful, phenomenon is that "when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again"' (72). Mourning and remembering are thus seen as work which liberates.

However, the question remains whether the psychological categories proposed by Freud in these essays can be legitimately transposed to the plane of collective memory and to history. Ricoeur answers this complex question as follows:

¹⁷ For an explanation of the tradition of the *ars memoriae* see Ricoeur, 2004:61-65. Cf. Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory*, 1966.

‘Regardless of this genuinely formidable difficulty, it is more important for our purpose to look to collective memory and to discover there the equivalent of the pathological situations with which psychoanalysis is concerned. It is the bipolar constitution of personal and community identity that, ultimately, justifies extending the Freudian analysis of mourning to the traumatism of collective identity. We can speak not only in an analogical sense but in terms of a direct analysis of collective traumatisms, of wounds to collective memory. The notion of the lost object finds a direct application in the “losses” that affect the power, territory, and population that constitute the substance of a state. Mourning behaviours, from the expression of affliction to complete reconciliation with the lost object, are directly illustrated by the great funeral celebrations around which an entire people are assembled. In this way we can say that such mourning behaviours constitute a privileged example of the intersecting relations between private and public expression’ (Ricoeur, 2004: 78).

On the practical level where we deal with manipulated memory, the concern is no longer wounded memory, but instrumentalised memory. In one sense we deal here simultaneously with the abuses of memory and the abuses of forgetting – one thing is remembered at the cost of another. The problematics of memory and identity intersect here because at the heart of the problem of identity is the mobilisation of memory for this endeavour. Ricoeur thus places the fragility of memory and the fragility of identity on the same level, and he identifies three causes for the latter. Firstly, the difficult relation to time: ‘what... does it mean to remain the same over time?’ (81). Secondly, confrontation with others is inevitable, but this confrontation is experienced as a threat to singular and collective identity. In the third instance the heritage of founding violence is a cause of the fragility of identity. Historical communities exist because of founding events which are essentially violent. However, this means that ‘the same events are thus found to signify glory for some, humiliation for others’ (82). Manipulated memory is the result of the demand for identity on the one hand, and the public expression of identity on the other. In this way ideology is established as the guardian of identity. Ideology itself is not, however, manipulative, but we have to keep in mind that with ideology comes a system of power. The system is kept intact by stories of founding events, the official history, those facts that everyone is supposed to know – ‘the history publicly learned and celebrated... A formidable pact is concluded in this way between remembrance, memorisation, and commemoration’ (85).

The third level, the ethico-political, implies an alleged duty to remember, called obligated memory. This duty to remember can very easily be interpreted as an invitation to short-

circuit the work of history. Ricoeur is very cautious of this, for his plea is on behalf of 'memory as the womb of history, inasmuch as memory remains the guardian of the entire problem of the representative relation of the present to the past' (87). Taking into account the horrible events of the mid-twentieth century, the duty to remember becomes equivocal. 'To say: you will remember, is also to say: you will not forget' (87). Moreover, the duty of memory is considered as the imperative of justice. Ricoeur gives three reasons for the relation of the duty of memory to the idea of justice. Firstly, the virtue of justice is par excellence turned towards others. 'The duty of memory is the duty to do justice, through memories, to an other than the self' (89). Secondly, we must show justice to those who have gone before us, for we are indebted to them for part of what we are. And thirdly, although there are others to whom we are indebted, our priority needs to lie with the victims. The victim is also the other – victims other than ourselves.

1.3. The memory of the individual or the memory of the collective

Is memory essentially personal or collective? This question has not been awarded much attention until now, but it is indeed important as the *pathos* and *praxis* of memory which have been discussed earlier need to be attributed to someone. But to whom can we legitimately attribute it? If we follow the dominant philosophical traditions we see that the younger tradition of objectivity is opposed to the ancient tradition of reflexivity to such an extent that individual memory and collective memory are portrayed as rivals of one another. However, if we study the different positions closely, the hypothesis arises that although the two discourses are distinct, they are nonetheless interconnected and reciprocal. Ricoeur therefore takes a closer look at the work of Augustine, Locke, Husserl and Maurice Halbwachs.

Augustine is regarded as the initiator of the tradition of inwardness. His starting point is 'the inner man remembering himself' (98). By this he means that the memory of things is always intertwined with the memory of the self. Augustine uses the metaphors of the "spacious place" and "storehouse" to explain this. In this way he portrays memory as being an intimate place where things are stored. These "things" are not limited to images of sensible impressions, but includes intellectual notions (things learned), as well as 'passions of the soul: the memory is, in fact, capable of recalling joy without being joyful, and sadness

without being sad' (99). Augustine's main point, however, is that none of these "things" are recalled without the self being recalled: 'the memory of "things" and the memory of myself coincide' (99).

The storehouse is furthermore seen as the place where memories are stored that have not yet been engulfed by forgetfulness. The storehouse is the safeguard against forgetfulness. In an interesting move, however, Augustine adds to the memory of memory a memory of forgetting: 'if it is true that what we remember we retain in our memory, and if it is also true that unless we remember forgetfulness, we could not possibly recognize the meaning of the word when we heard it, then it is true that forgetfulness is retained in memory' (100).

John Locke can be seen as the inventor of identity, consciousness, and self. For Locke, identity is purely reflexive. Identity is opposed to diversity because 'identity equals sameness with self' (104). The consciousness of which Locke speaks is the consciousness that constitutes the distinction between another person and the self. One is conscious of one's own identity in a different way than one is conscious of another person's identity. The relation between consciousness, self and memory enters the discussion in the following way: 'as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person' (105). The identity of a person is thus formed by the memory of consciousness. Memory and consciousness are thus close to being the same thing. What memory presents is the fact that consciousness does not only exist in the present, but that it stretches into the past.

It is Husserl who constructs the tradition of inwardness as a deadlock towards collective memory. Like Augustine he ties together the three problematics of interiority, memory, and time. For Husserl there is no gap between time and consciousness; the consciousness of time is internal. On the one hand the Husserlian text *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* (1893-1917) is used to show this relation between time and consciousness. On the other hand Ricoeur draws on the *Fifth Cartesian Meditation* (1931) where 'Husserl attempts to pass from the solitary *ego* to the other capable of becoming, in turn, an *us*' (117). Whereas the first text explicates temporal experience (mainly ascribed to the sphere of ownness), the latter proposes the "communalisation" of experience. The phenomenon of temporal experience explained in *Phenomenology of the Consciousness of*

Internal Time nowhere allows for this experience to become shared experience. However, in the *Fifth Cartesian Meditation* the “communalisation” of experience is proposed based on a ‘common ground of physical nature to the celebrated constitution of “higher intersubjective communities”, a constitution resulting from a process of “social communalisation”’ (118). Ricoeur explains the connection between the self and the other as follows: ‘On the one hand, it is indeed as foreign, that is as not-me, that the other is constituted, but it is “in” me that he is constituted’ (118). The path from personal to collective which is proposed is thus from ownness through the experience of the other to the communalisation of experience.

In opposition to Augustine, Locke and Husserl, Maurice Halbwachs represents the external gaze. In his work *The Collective Memory* (1925) he argues that we need others to remember. Memory is thus directly attributed to a collective entity. According to Ricoeur the advance made in this work was to ‘draw the reference to the collective memory out of the very work of personal memory engaged in recalling its memories’ (120). The basic thesis is that one does not remember alone. Individuals belong to a group, and it is in this group and together with this group that they remember. The example of childhood memories provides a good explanation hereof. The memories that we have of our childhood are situated within socially marked places, and the worlds we remember are worlds inhabited by other people. ‘By this we understand that the social framework ceased to be simply an objective notion and becomes a dimension inherent in the work of recollection’ (121-122). According to Ricoeur Halbwachs argues that it is an illusion to think that we have (individual) memories. The social setting has such an influence on us that it becomes imperceptible to us. It is an illusion to attribute memories to ourselves and to claim that we are their original owners.

However, Ricoeur is slightly sceptical of this reasoning. He argues that Halbwachs might be crossing an invisible line; in his own words, ‘the line separating the thesis “no one ever remembers alone” from the thesis “we are not an authentic subject of the attribution of memories”’ (122). Ricoeur is of the opinion that Halbwachs’ argument is grounded in an idea of a society without any social actors. The mere act of placing or displacing oneself in a group presupposes the existence of social actors. Ricoeur is critical of Halbwachs here, and shows the incoherency in his argumentation as he proceeds to his conclusion. However, Ricoeur is of the opinion that this incoherency does not suggest it is necessary to declare the whole argument invalid. Ricoeur argues that ‘it was in the personal act of recollection that

the mark of the social was initially sought and found. This act of recollection is in each case ours. To believe this, to attest to it, cannot be denounced as a radical illusion' (123).

1.4. The attribution of memory: ego, collectives, and close relations

After discussing the internal and external traditions of memory it is still unsure whether memory should be attributed to individuals or to the collective. Ricoeur states that 'whether we consider the sociology of collective memory or the phenomenology of individual memory, neither has any greater success than the other in deriving the apparent legitimacy of the adverse positions from the strong position each, respectively, holds: on one side, the cohesion of the states of consciousness of the individual ego; on the other, the capacity of collective entities to preserve and recall common memories. What is more, the attempts at derivation are not even symmetrical; this is why there appear to be no areas of overlap between a phenomenological derivation of collective memory and a sociological derivation of individual memory' (124). To constitute the still uncertain relation between personal and collective memory Ricoeur sets off to explore the notions of ego, collectives, and close relations. He furthermore places a specific focus on the linguistic region where personal and collective memory might intersect. Ordinary language is alive with examples of physical operations ascribed to someone. The grammatical use of possessive forms (my, mine), which we encounter in both singular and plural forms, is of specific importance for this study. In this respect, we may also assert that linguistics allows for the possession of memories. However, it was John Locke who began to use the expressions "appropriate", "own", "impute" and "accountable" in this sense. The idea of appropriation is hereby extended from 'a theory of action to a theory of memory' (125). This is made possible by the work of P.F. Strawson, *Individuals* (1959), where he developed positions concerning the 'general relations between practical predicates in particular and mental predicates in general' (125). The most important characteristic of these predicates for our study is that 'whenever they are attributable to oneself, they can be attributed to someone other than oneself' (125). Three distinct propositions are implied by this mobility: '1) the attribution can be suspended or performed; 2) these predicates retain the same sense in two distinct situations of attribution; 3) this multiple attribution preserves the asymmetry between self-ascribable and other-ascribable' (125).

The interrelatedness of these presuppositions is what paves the way for a further rapprochement between the phenomenological thesis and the sociological thesis. Ricoeur argues that a phenomenology of memory, facing the competition of a sociology of memory, can develop 'in the direction of a direct phenomenology applied to the social reality, which includes the participation of subjects capable of designating themselves as being, to different degrees of reflective consciousness, the authors of their acts' (128). That such a phenomenology includes the other is inevitable, as memory in its declarative phase operates in the region of language – and language is always the language of others, too. Moreover, memory operating in the region of language sets foot upon the path of orality, and thus also on the path of the narrative, which is obviously public and therefore also the domain of the other.

Ricoeur argues further that it is by becoming a phenomenology of social reality that the phenomenology of memory was able to make way into the field of sociology. He cites the work of Alfred Schutz (*The Phenomenology of the Social World*, 1967) for whom 'the experience of others is a given as primal as the experience of the self... We believe in the existence of others because we act with them and on them and are affected by their actions' (130). The world we live in is shared by others, and our experience of this world is a shared experience that 'rests upon a community of time as well as space' (130).

Following these developments in phenomenology, Ricoeur makes three remarks. Firstly, the phenomena of representation, influenced by action theory, are moving away from too much perceptual and cognitive emphasis to also include social practices. Secondly, historians have an increasing role to play in dealing with the problems posed by the sociology of collective memory by focusing on the temporal dimension of social phenomena. The border between collective memory and history is to become the location for this discussion. And thirdly, history is to play the mediating role between the opposite poles of individual memory and collective memory by drawing on the notions of micro-history and macro-history.

A slight uneasiness regarding the relation between collective and individual memory remains, to such an extent that it probes Ricoeur to ask:

'Does there not exist an intermediate level of reference between the poles of individual memory and collective memory, where concrete exchanges

operate between the living memory of individual people and the public memory of the communities we belong to?' (131).

He suggests that this intermediate level is constituted by our close relations, and adds that we have a right to attribute to them a memory of a distinct kind. He describes these close relations as 'people who count for us and for whom we count' and explains that they 'are situated along a range of varying distances in the relation between self and others' (131). But what role have these close relations to play in the discussion about individual memory and collective memory? Ricoeur explains this by using the example of the birth and death of a person. These are both very important events in the life of a person, but one that the person has no memory of: '(t)he first escapes my memory, the second cuts short my plans' (132). Furthermore, the broader society takes interest in these events only to the extent of public records. However, both these events are of great importance to a person's close relations. As Ricoeur strikingly states,

'Some of them will deplore my death. But before that, some rejoiced at my birth and celebrated on that occasion the miracle of natality, and the bestowal of the name by which I will call myself my entire life. In the meantime, my close relations are those who approve of my existence and whose existence I approve of in reciprocity and equality of esteem' (132).

With this hypothesis of the threefold attribution of memory, to oneself, to one's close relations, and to others, Ricoeur ends the phenomenology of memory and enters the field of history and epistemology that awaits us.

2. Knowing History: The Epistemology of Historical Knowledge

Above we discussed Ricoeur's engagement with the phenomenon of memory. Memory is something that we are familiar with; it manifests itself in different areas of our lives, and influences our lives in different ways. However, in order to trace the move from memory to history, to qualify memory in a scientific way, and to speak of the epistemology of historical knowledge, Ricoeur holds that history will have to attain its full autonomous status among the human sciences (136). He adds that '(i)t remains the case that the autonomy of historical knowledge in relation to the mnemonic phenomena remains the major presupposition of a coherent epistemology of history both as a scientific discipline and a literary one' (136). Ricoeur acknowledges this presupposition in the second major part of his work.

In the quest for such an autonomous science, history is proposed to be constituted by the documentary phase of archived memory, the explanation and understanding phase, and the representative phase. These three phases¹⁸, together comprising the historiographical operation¹⁹, will consequently be discussed in order to illuminate historical knowledge. Ricoeur explains the different phases, in short, as follows:

'I shall call the "documentary phase" the one that runs from the declarations of eyewitnesses to the constituting of archives, which takes as its epistemological program the establishing of documentary proof... Next I shall call the explanation/understanding... phase the one that has to do with the multiple uses of the connective "because" responding to the question "why?": Why did things happen like that and not otherwise? The double term explanation/understanding is indicative of my refusing the opposition between explanation and understanding that all too often has prevented grasping the treatment of the historical "because" in its full amplitude and complexity... Finally, I shall call the "representative phase" the putting into literary or written form of discourse offered to the readers of history (136).

¹⁸ Ricoeur explains that the word phase characterises 'the three segments of the historiographical operation. There is no need for any equivocation concerning the use of this term. It is not a question of distinct chronological stages, but of methodological moments, interwoven with one another. As will be repeated, no one consults an archive apart from some project of explanations, without some hypothesis of understanding. And no one undertakes to explain a course of events without making use of some express literary form of a narrative, rhetorical, or imaginative character. Any idea of chronological succession must be banished from our use of the term "operative phase"... Each of the three operations of the historiographical operation stands as a base for the other two, inasmuch as they serve successively as referents for the other two.' (137).

¹⁹ Ricoeur adopts the expression from Michel de Certeau in his contribution to the large-scale project edited by Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora under the title *Faire de l'histoire*.

It is important, however, to state clearly what Ricoeur refers to when he speaks of historiography. He asserts that he uses it, 'as does De Certeau, to designate the very operation in which historical knowing is grasped at work' (138). His use of the concept is thus broader than that suggested by the composition of the word: historiography implies history writing. For Ricoeur, historiography is not limited to the literary or scriptural phase of the historiographical operation (the third of his phases) but is comprised by the entire operation. As Ricoeur explains, '(w)riting, in effect, is the threshold of language that historical knowing has already crossed, in distancing itself from memory to undertake the threefold adventure of archival research, explanation, and representation' (138). Here Ricoeur stresses the point that '(h)istory is writing from one end to another' (138) and he furthermore explains that 'in this regard, archives constitute the first writing that confronts history, before it completes itself in the literary mode of "scripturality." Explanation/understanding thus finds itself encased, upstream and downstream, by two writings. It gathers energy from the former and anticipates the energy of the latter' (138).

As mentioned by Ricoeur, we will also be confronted with history's truth aim – or, one can say, the intention of being faithful to memory. Along with this the limits inherent to such a philosophical project will be discovered and, accordingly, we will have to deal with Ricoeur's engagement of the question of the epistemological autonomy of historical research and the self-sufficiency of history's own self-awareness. This will be dealt with specifically in the third part (3.3 in this work).

The need to develop a historical epistemology comes from the aporias discussed in the section above, namely, the representation of an absent thing, and the uses and abuses to which memory lends itself. What is at stake here is the relation between 'knowledge and the practice of history and the experience of lived memory' (136). Although we can understand the above mentioned aporias by way of the phenomenology of memory, it remains the task of the epistemology of historical knowledge to explain the relation between history and life. To this we turn our attention in the discussion that follows.

2.1. The ambiguity of historical knowledge: Plato's *Phaedrus*

Right from the start of the discussion on the historiographical operation, Ricoeur is aware of the innate ambiguity of this operation. He calls it 'the question of confidence that cannot be answered from inside the epistemology of historical knowledge, the question of what finally becomes of the relation between history and memory' (138). He asserts that this question, if it cannot be resolved, should at least be articulated and considered throughout the discussion on historiography. Hence, Ricoeur places in the position of a prelude to this discussion the Platonic myth from the *Phaedrus*. It serves as a parody dedicated to the invention of writing. Ricoeur explains that '(i)nasmuch as the gift of writing is held by this myth to be the antidote to memory, and therefore a kind of challenge opposed by the truth claim of history to memory's vow of trustworthiness, it can be taken as the paradigm for every dream of substituting history for memory...' (138). Ricoeur thus extends the myth of the origin of writing to include also the origin of history. He argues that 'it is to true memory, genuine memory, that the invention of writing and its related drugs are opposed as a threat. How then can the debate between memory and history not be affected by this myth?' (14). The prevailing question posed by this myth is whether the *pharmakon* of history-writing is remedy, or whether it is, in fact, poison. Ricoeur holds that this question will accompany the entire epistemological inquiry as a kind of background music.

In the myth, Theuth discovers a potion (*pharmakon*) for memory and wisdom that will make the Egyptians wiser and will improve their memory. 'It is the *grammata* that come to the fore among the potions offered by the one whom Theuth calls "the father of writing," "the father of the *grammata*"' (141). But what exactly is it that we deal with here? Is this potion that Theuth offers – writing – not in a certain way the heir of artificial memory? If it is, then it means that what Theuth offers is memorisation rather than remembering, and exploit and manipulation immediately enter the scene. In the myth the king 'readily concedes to the god the privilege of engendering the art, but he retains the right to judge what he calls its "benefit" and "harm"' (142). The king's response therefore immediately introduces the ambiguous nature of the *pharmakon*. The king's response to the god's offer makes it clear that the *pharmakon* does not simply imply remedy. In fact, he argues, 'it will introduce forgetfulness into the soul of those who learn it: they will not practice using their memory

because they will put their trust in writing, which is external and depends on signs that belong to others, instead of trying to remember from the inside, completely on their own. You have not discovered a potion for remembering, but for reminding; you provide your students with the appearance of wisdom, not with its reality' (142). What is at issue here is memory by default – memorisation.

What can the discourse on true memory (as opposed to the discourse on memory by default) then offer? In Plato's words, as cited by Ricoeur, this discourse 'is a discourse that is written down, with knowledge, in the soul of the listener; it can defend itself, and it knows for whom it should speak and for whom it should remain silent' (143). The difference is therefore the difference between a living memory and a dead deposit. The question is not simply whether it is poison or remedy to write history down, because it is more than epistemological truth that is at stake. Ethics and aesthetics should also be taken into account because history does not only serve the dead and a past that is long gone, but memory and history, significantly, also serve the living – in the present and in the future. And because of the expecting character of the future we can never know for sure whether the writing of history is healing or poisonous. The ambiguity remains.

2.2. The documentary phase

The first phase of the historiographical operation discussed by Ricoeur is what he calls the documentary phase. This phase begins with memory at its declarative stage and tracks the expansion that takes place up to the point where it becomes documentary proof. The switch to history from memory encompasses different levels: the formal level of space and time²⁰; testimony, where declarative memory externalizes itself²¹; the inscription of testimony; and the level where it enters the critical zone of being confronted by competing testimonies, and absorbed into a mass of documents – the archive; and finally, the level at which the question about the validity of documentary proof arises.

2.2.1. The movement from memory to history on the level of space and time

As motivation for his argument that space and time as philosophical concepts are important for the philosophy of history, Ricoeur states that '(i)f historiography is first of all archived memory and if all the subsequent operations taken up by the epistemology of historical knowledge proceed from this initial gesture of archiving, the historian's mutation of space and time can be taken as the formal condition of possibility for this gesture of archiving' (148). Memory cannot be separated from space and time.

For Ricoeur, the basic link between memory and history is the witness's testimony in the form of the declaration, "I was there." In this declaration we can see how interlinked the notions of time and space really are, and this is of utter importance for constituting documentary proof. The declaration consists of a verb indicating the time and an adverb indicative of the place. In the first part of his work dealing with the phenomenology of memory, Ricoeur already touches on the notion of spatiality in the proposed opposition between the worldliness of memory and its reflexive pole. In the discussion at the beginning of this chapter (*Memory as a phenomenon in western philosophy: the entanglement of memory and imagination*) we followed Ricoeur's argument that corporeal and environmental spatiality are inherent to the evocation of memory. Ricoeur uses the example of the memory of having inhabited some house in some town or that of having

²⁰ This is discussed by Ricoeur under the headings "Inhabited space" (ff. 147) and "Historical time" (ff. 153).

²¹ This is discussed by Ricoeur under the heading "Testimony" (ff. 161).

travelled in some part of the world (148). Taking this argument further, Ricoeur gives the first step to draw parallels between the spatiality of geography and the temporality of history by proposing a phenomenology of “place” or “site.”²² Drawing on ordinary language we can state that “place” has to do with emplacement and displacement – experiences that are familiar to the lived body. Ricoeur explains that ‘[t]he body, the absolute here, is the landmark for any there, be it near or far, included or excluded, above or below, right or left, in front or behind, as well as those asymmetric dimensions that articulate a corporeal typology that is not without at least implicit ethical overtones, for example, height or the right side’ (149).

What is, furthermore, included by the notions of emplacement and displacement is the notion of inhabiting or inhabited space, which has its own polarities: ‘reside and displace, take shelter under a roof, cross a threshold and go out’ (150). In this way lived space and geometric space overlap. Ricoeur explains it as follows:

‘In truth, displacement of the body and even its remaining in place cannot be spoken of, nor even thought, nor even at the limit experienced without some, at least allusive, reference to points, lines, surfaces, volumes, distances inscribed on a space detached from the reference to the here and there inherent to the lived body. Between the lived space of the lived body and the environment and public space is intercalated geometric space. In relation to it, there is no longer any privileged place but only different localities. The act of inhabiting is situated at the boundaries of lived space and geometric space’ (150).

Furthermore, Ricoeur argues that the act of inhabiting is put in place only by an act of construction, or architecture. Ricoeur argues that the act of constructing in relation to space functions on the same level as the configuration of time by emplotment in the sense that it brings about a type of intelligibility. The analogies and overlapping of “narrated” time and “constructed” space are seen in the way that narrative and construction ‘bring about a similar kind of inscription, the one in the endurance of time, the other in the enduringness of materials’ (150). Constructed space becomes a lived place superimposed on and interwoven with its geometrical properties ‘in the same way that narrated time weaves together cosmic and phenomenological time’ (150).

²² Here Ricoeur draws on the work of Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

However, in order to ‘give the time of history a spatial analogue worthy of a human science’ (151) we need to ‘move from the constructed space of architecture to the inhabited land of geography’ (151). Geography is important in this regard because it takes seriously the notions of setting, lifestyle, and everydayness – those things that are important if memory is to be something more than a dead deposit. Ricoeur twice cites from *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*: ‘any civilisation is at bottom a space worked by men and history,’ and again ‘What is civilisation if not the timeworn placement of a certain humanity in a certain space?’ (152). Ricoeur uses Braudel’s concept of “geohistory” which refers to the mixture between climate and culture which implies that the scope of the setting, the lifestyle, and the everydayness is broadened to include more than just specificities and particularities when it comes to historiography. Ricoeur calls this the *hypergeometrical* level of the *oikoumenē* – the level incorporating the whole of the phenomenology of “places”: beings of flesh and blood who occupy, the notion of architecture, geography that describes inhabited space, and geometrical spaces are all included on the level of the *oikoumenē*.

Turning to the notion of historical time, Ricoeur states that the dialectic of lived space, geometrical space, and inhabited space discussed up to this point corresponds to ‘a similar dialectic of lived time, cosmic time, and historical time’ (153). In his work, *Time and Narrative Volume 3* (1988), Ricoeur gives a detailed analysis of calendar time that is important to take note of. However, the focus here is slightly different. It is ‘not so much the reconciliation of the phenomenological and cosmological perspectives on time that is at issue as the transition from living memory to the “extrinsic” positing of historical knowledge’ (153). Ricoeur uses the concept “third-order time” here to refer to what, he claims, Émile Benveniste calls “chronicle time.” According to Ricoeur (153-154), Benveniste defines “chronicle time” as follows: ‘1) the reference of every event to a founding event that defines the axis of time; 2) the possibility of traversing the intervals of time in terms of the two opposed directions of anteriority and posteriority in relation to the zero date; and 3) the constitution of a repertory of units serving to name recurring intervals: day, month, year, and so on.’

The latter is what needs to be placed in relation to the historian’s mutation of the time of memory. Ricoeur draws on Aristotle, Augustine, Kant, Husserl, and Bergson to argue that

dating as a phenomenon of inscription comes about because of a capacity for dating which is inherent to lived experience. We can indeed, as Ricoeur claims, add to the declaration “I was there” the affirmation that this happened “before”, “during”, “after”, “since”, “during so much time” (154). Calendar time allows us to date events by a system that is extrinsic to the events themselves. ‘Just as in geographical space the places referred to the absolute “here” of the lived body and its environment become particular locations that can be inscribed among the sites that cartography maps, so too the present moment with its absolute “now” becomes a particular date among all the ones whose exact calculation is allowed for by the calendar in terms of the framework of some calendar system accepted by a more or less extended part of humanity’ (154-155). The absolute “now” of the present moment becomes the reference point of time, yet it is nothing more than just a particular date among all the other dates on the calendar. Concerning the memory of past events we thus speak of events in “another time” that occurred “before that.” Moreover, speaking about the future, the expectation of what is yet to come becomes the “when that” and the anticipated events are arranged to coincide with the grid of dates to come.

Still, calendar time cannot be reduced to lived time; neither can time be reduced to calendar time. Hence Ricoeur mentions the ‘four ways of visualising time’ of Krzysztof Pomian, in *L’Ordre du temps* (1984), ‘chronometry, chronology, chronography, and chronosophy’ (155). Chronometry ‘designates the short or long cycles of time that recur, that return in cycles: day, week, month, year’ (156). Chronology ‘designates the linear time of long periods: century, millennium, and so forth, whose scansion is punctuated in diverse ways by founding events and founders; cycles that take place over a number of years, such as, for example, the Greek Olympiads’ (156). Ricoeur states that both chronometry and chronology are measured by clocks and calendars, ‘with the reservation that the intervals of chronology – such as eras – have a signification that is as much qualitative as quantitative’ (156). Chronology, moreover, shows similarities to the historian’s intention in the sense that it ‘knows how to order events as a function of a series of dates and names, and to order the sequence of eras and their subdivisions’ (156). However, it ignores the separation between nature and history. With regards to chronography, ‘we come to systems of notation that can go beyond the calendar. The noted episodes are defined by their relations to other episodes: a succession of unique, good or bad, joyful or sorrowful events’ (156). Here we

have to do with time that is neither cyclic nor linear, but instead, what Ricoeur calls, amorphous. When it comes to chronosophy, Ricoeur holds that it exceeds the project of a critical history. Ricoeur uses Pomian's definition of chronosophy: 'those large-scale periodizations of history such as those of Islam and Christianity and their attempt to make them correspond with chronology' (157)²³. He is critical of this notion of time, stating that 'it is not principally the phenomenology of lived times or the exercise of popular or scholarly narratives that history confronts here, but an order of thought that ignores the sense of limits' (156). For Ricoeur, the biggest problem with the notion of chronosophy is perhaps whether a history without direction or continuity is indeed possible. And if it is, 'would this not be to remove from history any horizon of expectation?' (159).

These concepts broaden the notion of time. To define time and to use it as a concept in history is at once a way in which the immense order of what is thinkable is limited, and a way in which the order of lived experience is surpassed (156).

Ricoeur proposes a set of three statements regarding the notion of historical time that are important for historians to take note of: 1) the historiographical operation proceeds from both the lived experience of memory and the multi-millenary speculation on the order of time; 2) the structuralism that historians have dealt with for ages, stems from a theoretical stance that is to be found alongside the prolonging of the great theological and philosophical chronosophies, as a kind of scientific, even scientistic chronosophy and it is important for historians to note the theological and philosophical influence inherent to the systems of time with which and in which we operate; 3) It might be that 'historical knowledge has never, in fact, stopped dealing with these visions of historical time, when it speaks of cyclical or linear time, stationary time, decline or progress' (161). Ricoeur proposes, albeit by way of a question, that it will 'be the task of a memory instructed by history to preserve the trace of this speculative history over the centuries and to integrate it into a symbolic universe' (161).

²³ Ricoeur states, furthermore, that religious and political chronosophies usually clash.

2.2.2. The notion of testimony in Ricoeur's work

But what role does testimony play in our discussion of the documentary phase of epistemological history?

Testimony deals with the things of the past. These are the conditions that are necessary for the actual process of the historiographical operation. 'With testimony opens an epistemological process that departs from declared memory, passes through the archive and documents, and finds its fulfilment in documentary proof' (161). Someone testifies about something that happened somewhere, sometime. The significance of testimony lies in the fact that it crosses the boundaries of space and time, as it testifies about a specific time and place in another time and place. It is therefore testimony that links different times and spaces with each other.

Testimony is not by implication archived memory that follows from the moment of inscription. It has more uses than this, for example the testimony/witnessing in daily life, and the judicial use of testimonies. Testimony placed into an archive and sanctioned by documentary proof is but one use of testimony, even though it is the one we will primarily focus on here. The crucial question we face regarding testimony is, 'to what point is testimony trustworthy?' (162). This question holds the confidence and suspicion with regards to testimony in balance. Ricoeur uses the work of Renaud Dulong, *Le Témoin oculaire: Les Conditions sociales de l'attestation personnelle* (1988), to define the notion of testimony: 'An autobiographically certified narrative of a past event, whether this narrative be made in informal or formal circumstances' (163). By way of six observations Ricoeur unpacks the operation of testimony (163-166).

1) Two sides are initially distinguished: the assertion of the factual reality of the reported event, and the trustworthiness of the declaration of the author based on her/his experience. The first side can be seen as the conveying of information (the description of the experienced scene in a narration), but Ricoeur asserts that this information ought to be important and significant. Furthermore, a clear boundary between reality and fiction should exist regarding the factuality attested to. Here we are again confronted with the problematic faced in the phenomenology of memory: the relation between reality and fiction.

2) 'The specificity of testimony consists of the fact that the assertion of reality is inseparable from its being paired with the self designation of the testifying subject. The typical formulation of testimony proceeds from this passing: I was there' (163). It is indivisibly the reality of the past thing and the presence of the narrator at the place of its occurrence that are attested to. Furthermore, it is the witness herself that names and declares herself a witness. Ricoeur argues that a triple deictic marks this self-designation: 'the first-person singular, the past tense of the verb, and the mention of there in relation to here' (164). The self-designation also points to the interwovenness, and even messiness, of a personal history with the past being attested to.

3) Testimony takes place in a dialogical situation that is linked to the self-designation of being a witness. The witness testifies before someone to the reality of some scene of which he/she was a part. He/she becomes the third person observer who testifies about a situation and asks to be believed. 'He does not limit himself to saying "I was there," he adds "believe me"' (164). A testimony thus has to be certified and accredited by someone. This accreditation opens up the alternative between confidence and suspicion that pertains to testimony.

4) 'The possibility of suspicion in turn opens a space of controversy within which several testimonies and several witnesses find themselves confronted with one another... It is against this background that a critique of testimony is grafted to its practice. The witness anticipates these circumstances in a way by adding a third clause to his declaration: "I was there," he says, "believe me," to which he adds, "If you do not believe me, ask someone else," said almost like a challenge. The witness is thus the one who accepts being questioned and expected to answer what may turn out to be a criticism of what he says' (164-165).

5) The witness is available to repeat his/her testimony in order to reinforce the credibility and the trustworthiness of testimony. The trustworthiness of the witness is then measured by the steadfastness of his/her testimony over time. This reminds one of promise-making; or perhaps the promise that precedes the making of the promise, that is, the promise of keeping one's word. 'The witness must be capable of answering for what he says before whoever asks him to do so' (165).

6) Testimony is thus seen to be constitutive of a social bond with a stable structure. '[T]his contribution of the trustworthiness of an important proportion of social agents to the overall security of society in general makes testimony into an institution' (165). Ricoeur opposes this "natural institution" of testimony to the memory tricks cultivated by the *ars memoriae*. What makes testimony an institution is, 'first of all, the stability of testimony ready to be reiterated, and next the contribution of the trustworthiness of each testimony to the security of the social bond as this rests on confidence in what other people say' (165). The assent to others' word is what proves the competence of the capable human being – an important notion in Ricoeur's thinking. 'The credit granted to the word of others makes the social world a shared intersubjective world... What confidence in the word of others reinforces is not just the interdependence, but the shared common humanity, of the members of a community' (165-166).

2.2.3. From testimony to archive

From the above we can see that testimony and the archive are not the same thing, and accordingly we make a distinction between the two in the discussion on the documentary phase. Where testimony is by origin oral, the archive 'is the moment of the entry into writing of the historiographical operation' (166). The historian consults the constituted archive, but before he or she can do that there is the archiving of things – the moment when the archive comes into being. This is possible because testimony can be reiterated, it can be written down, deposited. But it is also possible because testimony is the narrative follow-up to declarative memory, and a narrative can be detached from its narrator. 'Between the saying and the said of any utterance' (166) there is a subtle gap that allows what is stated to have a life of its own.

The gap and the deposition are 'the condition of possibility of specific institutions devoted to the collecting, conserving, and classifying of documentation with an eye to its subsequently being consulted by qualified personnel' (167). Ricoeur explains that the archive is a physical place that shelters the destiny of that kind of trace that is distinguished from cerebral traces and affective traces. This is called the documentary trace. The archive is, furthermore, not just a physical or spatial place, but also a social one. It is constituted by

the act of placing materials in the archive, thus forming multileveled architecture, and the primary goal of this act is the establishing of documentary proof. But before we get to the establishing of answers there is the establishing of sources. The setting aside, putting together, and collecting are the disciplines of the archivist 'to which the epistemology of the historical operation is indebted for the description of those features by which the archive breaks with the hearsay of oral testimony' (168). Ricoeur recalls again at this stage the myth in the *Phaedrus*, and argues that the passage from oral to written testimony by which the archive comes into being, remains in suspense, for we do not know whether it is a remedy or poison for living memory.

It is important, though, to note that the archive is distinguished from the hearsay of oral testimony by way of certain features. Here Ricoeur uses the argument of *Time and Narrative* in which he states that, first of all, with the archive someone takes the initiative to preserve traces, and this very 'initiative inaugurates the act of doing history' (168). It is with the preserving of certain traces that the operation of history is started. Secondly, the material set aside is then organised in a more or less systematic way that entails physical measures of preservation as well as logical operations regarding the classification of material. The third and primary feature is the consulting of materials made possible by the preceding preparation. We can thus, with Ricoeur, conclude that 'the essential core of archival materials consists in texts' and that 'the change in status from spoken testimony to being archived constitutes the first historical mutation in living memory...' (168). This implies that the archive cannot speak for itself, nor defend itself; it is open to whomever knows how to read. In contrast to testimony, the documents in the archive have no designated addressee and are moreover detached from their authors. They are orphans. 'They are handed over to the care of those are competent to question them and hence to defend them, by giving them aid and assistance. In our historical culture, the archive has assumed authority over those who consult it' (169). But the archive can in no way assure objectivity in historical research or protect the historian against his/her own subjectivity. Consulting the archive is by no means a passive process. However, Ricoeur argues that, whatever the shifts in documentary history may be, 'the documentary frenzy took hold once and for all' (169) Even so, Ricoeur furthermore states, rather ironically, that the archive is always incomplete, as

the words of Pierre Nora remind us: 'Archive as much as you like: something will always be left out' (169).

Ricoeur follows the historian into the archives in the company of Marc Bloch.²⁴ Drawing on Bloch's work, Ricoeur holds that the centrality of testimony in history flows from the very definition of the object of history. History is not about the past, nor is it about time, 'it is "men in time"' (170). Here we find again the importance of the notions of time and space as discussed above. Ricoeur cites Bloch's work saying that time is the setting, 'the very plasma in which events are immersed, and the field within which, they become intelligible' (170). This definition of history implies 'a fundamental relationship between the present and the past' (170). It gives rise to a dialectic where the present is understood by the past and the past is understood by the present. Hence the 'category of testimony comes on the scene as the trace of the past in the present' and testimony as a written trace is the 'mediation of an essentially retrospective science, of a thinking "backwards"' (170).

Written testimonies, however, are not the only form of trace. Vestiges of the past, generally associated with archaeology, also belong to the concept of testimony. We may call them "unwritten testimonies" (although it is important not to confuse it with oral testimonies), and refer to urns, tools, coins, painted or sculpted images, funerary objects, the remains of buildings, and so forth (170).

Another important category added to the notion of testimony, is that of voluntary and involuntary testimonies. The latter refer to 'the evidence of witnesses in spite of themselves' (171). Ricoeur states that 'apart from confessions, autobiographies, and other diaries, maps, secret documents, and some confidential reports by military leaders, the documents in the archives for the most part come from witnesses in spite of themselves' (171).

Ricoeur, by way of Bloch, identifies the most important question of the professional historian as follows: 'How can I know what I am about to say?' (171). The work of the historian becomes that of examining sources in order to distinguish the true from the false.

²⁴ Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, trans. Peter Putnam (New York: Vintage Books 1964).

2.2.4. Documentary proof

In this discussion on the documentary phase of the historiographical process, we mainly deal with two questions: what is proof for a document or group of documents? What is proved thereby? (177). Concerning the first question, one should keep in mind that a proof role can be attached to the consulted documents only because the historian approaches the archive armed with questions. Ricoeur again draws on the work of Marc Bloch, who was one of the first to warn against epistemological naïveté, 'namely, the idea that there could be a first phase where the historian gathered up the documents, read them, and weighed their authenticity and veracity, following which there came a second phase where he wrote them up' (177). In the words of Antoine Prost cited by Ricoeur: 'no observation without hypotheses, no facts without question'²⁵ (177). This implies that there is an interdependence among facts, documents, and questions. Furthermore, the question of the historian is not bare, but it expects to find certain documentary sources by way of research procedures. 'Trace, document, and question thus form the tripod base of historical knowledge' (177). The document is not a document by nature, but becomes a document when it is sought and found through questioning; it is circumscribed, constituted and instituted as a document through questioning. For a historian, everything can thus become a document, but everything can therefore also be interrogated by the historian 'with the idea of finding there some information about the past' (178).

It also means that things no longer regarded as testimonies today can be documents. It thus includes unwritten testimonies and recorded oral testimonies. As soon as testimonies are recorded, they become documents, and thereby 'leave behind the oral sphere to enter into that of writing and distance themselves in this way from the role of testimony in ordinary conversation' (178). Memory is then archived, documented.

We now turn to the second question: 'What at this stage of the historiographical operation can be held to have been proved?' (178). The answer is facts; facts capable of being asserted in singular, discrete propositions, most often having to do with the mentioning of dates, places, proper names and/or verbs that name an action or state (178). Ricoeur, however, alerts us to be aware of the difference at this stage between confirmed facts and past

²⁵ Antoine Prost, *Douze Leçons sur l'histoire* (Paris: Seuil, 1996).

events. We ought to guard against the illusion that what we call facts coincide with what really happened. Ricoeur reminds us that facts do not lie sleeping in the documents until the historians extract them. We need to resist the confusion between a historical fact and a really remembered event. It means that there is a difference between the historical fact and the empirical fact in the experimental natural sciences. 'The fact is not the event, itself given to the conscious life of a witness, but the contents of a statement meant to represent it' (178-179). We should take caution and always write: 'the fact that this occurred' (179). It is furthermore important to note that the truth or falsity attached to fact is pinpointed at this level, and not at the levels of explanation and representation.

Ricoeur emphasises the importance of the event in the historical operation, for the event is that about which someone testifies. 'But what is said in spoken testimony is a fact, the fact that...' (180). He asks the question: 'What is one talking about when one says that something happened?' (179), and then later states that '(t)he world, in history, is past human life as it happened' (179). He hereby makes room for the ambiguity that, although the first thing one can say is that "something took place", it does not imply that it took place as one states it. The question of the actual relation between fact and event appears again.

2.3. Explanation/Understanding

The second phase of the historiographical operation, the understanding and explaining phase, is implied by the documentary phase insofar as Ricoeur asserted that there is no document without some question and no question without an explanatory project. The document constituted by facts and testimonies of witnesses makes no sense on its own. Ricoeur holds that it is only in relation to explanation that the document is proof. '(W)hat the explanation/understanding phase adds that is new in relation to the documentary treatment of historical facts has to do with the modes of interconnectedness of the documented facts' (182). The question "Why?" is posed at the archive and answered time and again by use of the connector "because."

At this stage the role of the imagination enters the discussion again in a specific way. 'This use of the imagination carries our minds far beyond the sphere of private and public memory into the range of the possible' (182). The connections made between various facts are not obvious and are indeed a creation of the historian. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the responsibility of the historian to present the past truthfully may be lifted. Although imagination plays an important part here, it is vital that we remain within the domain of history and not move to that of fiction. To prevent the slipping from history to fiction, Ricoeur suggests that imagination should submit itself to an appropriate dividing up of its objects of reference. He proposes two guiding principles in this regard. The first is that we should note that explanatory models used by historians relate to human reality as a social fact. History thus takes its stand from the viewpoint of the social sciences; social history is not merely one sector among others. The second principle concerns history's place within the field of the social sciences (183). History distinguishes itself from other social sciences by means of the emphasis it places on change and on the differences or intervals affecting such changes. 'Changes and differences or intervals have a clear temporal connotation. This is why we can speak of a long time span, of the short run, of a point-like event' (183). Here, however, it is important to note that the time spans of the historian are not those of phenomenology, referring to the lived experience of temporal durations, but time spans constructed by the historian.

This brings us to realise (again) the diversity of uses of “because” connected to the answers to the question “why” (184). There are a variety of types of explanation in history of which ‘we can say without injustice that there is no privileged mode of explanation in history’ (184). This part of Ricoeur’s work is therefore an examining of the kind of intelligibility proper to explanation/understanding in terms of representations.

2.3.1. Important moments in recent French historiography: Ricoeur’s overview and critique

Ricoeur briefly reviews the primary moments in French historiography of the first sixty years of the twentieth century, which essentially follow the great adventure of the French *Annales* school. The section on *Promoting the History of Mentalities* (188-200) brings to the fore the question of method and the promotion of a privileged object (mentality). Ricoeur is interested in this because of the displacement on the plane of objects of reference that he sees happening in the movement. He is of the opinion that with this displacement ‘goes the displacement on the plane of methods and of modes of explanation’ (188). According to Ricoeur, the notions of singularity (of individuals or events), repeatability, and serial ordering are particularly affected, and even more so ‘are those of a collective constraint and correlatively of reception, passive or otherwise, on the part of social agents’ (189). Ricoeur affirms the fact that history does not and should not ‘disregard its discipline of distantiation in relation to lived experience’ (189) and to collective memory. It remains on the other side of the epistemological break and is thereby separated from the phenomenology of memory. For Ricoeur, memory is one of the powers of the capable human being. There is a distinction between the mnemonic representation (as discussed in the first part) and historical representation, and this distinction must be held up. Ricoeur strikingly expresses this problematic:

‘Between the mnemonic representation from the beginning of our discourse and the literary representation situated at the end of the trajectory of the historiographical operation, representation presents itself as an object, a referent, of the historian’s discourse. Can it be that the object represented by historians bears the mark of the initial enigma of mnemonic representation and anticipates the final enigma of the historical representation of the past?’ (190).

The first generation of the *Annales* school (when the founders Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch were the main role players) was characterised by the setting aside of singularity, of the event and of individuals, and of 'chronology marked out by narration and politics as the privileged site of intelligibility' (191). This happened as a rejection of positivist²⁶ history in the fashion of Seignobos and Langlois. The supposed passivity of the historian confronted with a collection of facts was opposed to the active intervention of the historian facing the document in an archive (191).

When both Febvre and Bloch were faced by the problem of the limits of representation in their work, the two founders responded differently to the interplay between society and individual. 'But what united them,' Ricoeur states, 'was, on the one hand, the assurance that the facts of civilisations stands out against the background of social history, and, on the other, the attention paid to the relations of interdependence among the spheres of activity of a society...' (192). Furthermore: 'Above all there was the confidence in the federative power of history in regard to the neighbouring social sciences...' (192).

Following World War I, the main characteristic of the *Annales* school became 'its preference for taking the economy as its privileged referent. The use of quantification applied to repeatable facts, to series, treated statistically with the help of the computer, went along with this initial preference' (193). Fernand Braudel emphasised the long time span with which historians were to work, and hereby the reference to total history, inherited from the founders of the movement, was forcefully reiterated by their successors. In this view of history there is no room for dependencies among the components of the social bond, no less when the preference for the long time span is regarded as a given and not a choice.

However, this frame of mind collapsed suddenly as the multiplicity of objects contributed directly to the complexity of the historical project. Despite the sudden disillusionment with the historical paradigm operative up to this point, a number of historians were not willing to accept that one paradigm should simply eliminate another. Jacques Revel, being one of the foremost critical historical thinkers of the time, asked the question: 'History burst apart of history under construction?' (195). He hereby proposes for a balance to be found between old and new paradigms. Ricoeur states that '(o)n the one hand, we have the spectacle of a

²⁶ Ricoeur is critical of the notion "positivist history" and refers to it as 'improperly called.'

loss of focus, which led to the talk of a burst-apart history, even of a history in little pieces; on the other hand, thanks to this same dispersion, there was a certain upturn' (196-197).

But Ricoeur argues that this balance of different paradigms was not tenable because the real rejection of the notion of mentalities has to do with a more serious confusion, namely, 'the uncertain simultaneous use of the notion as an object of inquiry... and as a means of explanation' (198). It is from this point of confusion that Ricoeur directs his own inquiry into the notions of explanation and understanding in the historiographical project.

2.3.2. Ricoeur on the "advocates of rigor" (Foucault, De Certeau, Elias)

Ricoeur broadens the discussion on the history of mentalities by engaging the work of what he calls three advocates of rigor, namely Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau, and Norbert Elias. The work of these scholars, strictly speaking, falls outside historiography, but by engaging them on this topic Ricoeur emphasises the radicality of the discussion that in fact takes place throughout the human sciences.

Ricoeur starts off with Foucault's work, *Archeology of Knowledge*.²⁷ Foucault's archeology is related to the notion of archive, even though it is an inversion thereof. Ricoeur explains that Foucault's notion of archaeology 'does not seek to reconstitute the past, to repeat what has been' (201). In the words of Foucault he states that '(i)t is nothing more than a rewriting: that is, in the preserved form of exteriority, a regulated transformation of what has already been written' (201). In opposition to the practice of the historians of ideas, who are concerned with continuities, transitions, anticipations, and preliminary sketches, archeology stands for discontinuity, ruptures, fault lines, and sudden redistributions. It refuses to reduce differences, in contrast with the history of ideas that regards difference as an error. Archeology's aim is therefore not to overcome differences, but to make difference the object of analysis, to explain exactly what it is, to differentiate it. Ricoeur explains archive and archeology as two culminating ideas: archive being the register of discursive formation, and archeology the description of interdiscursive transformations.

²⁷ Michel Foucault. 1972. *The Archeology of Knowledge*. Translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Harper Torchbooks.

We now turn to Michel de Certeau and the point of divergence between himself and Foucault. Ricoeur states that the major difference between the two lies on the 'side of the idea of production, and more explicitly the production of a place' (204). De Certeau argues that the archeology of knowledge does not mention the place of its own production. De Certeau thus proposes a history of representation that leaves behind the absolute neutrality of a discourse on discourse. De Certeau is furthermore of the opinion that it is human beings who make history and his research is 'rooted in a philosophical anthropology in which the reference to psychology is fundamental and foundational' (205). In this regard De Certeau was strongly influenced by Freud.

Norbert Elias' work operates on the macro-historical scale and confronts historians with another kind of rigor to consider than that practised by Foucault: 'not the rigor of a discourse on discursive operations apart from the field of practice, but the rigor of discourse on the conceptual apparatus put to work in an actual history bearing in a general way on the growth of political power from the end of the Middle Ages up to the eighteenth century' (206). Ricoeur mainly focuses on Elias' work *The Civilising Process*²⁸ and states that Elias' "civilising processes" directly concern his preoccupations relative to the establishing of a history of representations. Ricoeur explains that,

'on the one hand, the civilising process is correlated with the large-scale phenomena at the level of the organisation of society into the state, such as the monopolisation of force and taxation and other such fees; on the other hand, this process is described as a series of progressively internalised constraints up to the point where they become a phenomenon of permanent self-constraint that Elias names *habitus*. The self is in fact what is at stake in civilisation, what civilises itself, under the institutional constraint' (206-207).

The most noteworthy contribution of Elias' work lies in his examination of two major modes of self-constraint: rationalisation and shame. The former can be described as the reflection upon and the regulation of our emotions – that knowledge of the heart and the social setting. There is a close correlation between the social cohabitation of human beings and what a "historical psychology" will take as a *habitus* of the psychic economy considered as an integrated whole. The history of ideas wants only to consider contents, "ideas,"

²⁸ Norbert Elias, *The Civilising Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott with some notes and corrections by the author. Edited by Eric Dunning, Johan Goudsblom, and Stephen Mennel (Malden Mass.: Blackwell, 2000).

“thoughts,” the sociology of knowledge focuses on ideologies, or even a superstructure, psychoanalysis on a conflict between competing drives detached from their social history’ (208). Opposed to this, rationalisation consists of internal relations within the human being in correlation with human interrelationships. The civilising process is then defined as the correlation between changes affecting the psychic structures and those affecting social structures (208). The latter, shame, can be described as the ‘fear of revealing one’s inferiority, which is at the heart of weakness before another’s superiority’ (209).

We will hence see how Ricoeur aims to balance the important theme of constraint in Elias’ work with the theme of appropriation.

2.3.3. Variations in scale

Up to this point the question of scale adopted by the historian has not been posed. The dominant approach which we have seen in the mentalities and its advocates in the discussion thus far was macro-historical. What is important, though, is that this macro-historical approach was not deliberately chosen over or against another alternative. The notion of scale therefore has not functioned ‘as a power open to the historian’s discretion, with all the liberties and constraints that result from it’ (210). According to Ricoeur, this access to mobility on the part of the historian points to an important conquest of history during the last third of the twentieth century. The focus on micro-history that is evident in some Italian historians²⁹ signifies the recognition of this principle of variation. Ricoeur asserts the importance thereof by stating that ‘(t)he key attached to the idea of a variation in scale is that, when we change scale, what becomes visible are not the same interconnections, but rather connections that remained unperceived at the macro-historical scale.

The notion of scale, Ricoeur explains, is borrowed from cartography, architecture and optics. With regards to maps in cartography, one can say that there is an external referent or a territory represented by the map. The same terrain can be reduced to different scales specific to varying maps. ‘However, from one scale to another we observe a change in the level of information as a function to the level of organisation’ (211). In architecture the

²⁹ Ricoeur mentions together with the name of Jacques Revel those of Alban Bensa, Mauricio Gribandi, Simona Cerutti, Giovanni Levi, Sabina Loriga, Edoardo Grandi and Carlo Ginsburg.

balance between gain and loss of information depending on the scale chosen is also present. However, the plan of the architect, unlike the map of the cartographer, refers to a building or a town yet to be constructed. Moreover, the future building or town is to different degrees in relation with the context in which it is to exist, including, for example, nature, the landscape, communication networks, and the already constructed parts of the town. Ricoeur explains the similarities to the historiographical operation as follows:

‘These characteristics belonging to the notion of scale in architecture and in urban planning concern the historian inasmuch as the historiographical operation is in one sense an architectural one.’ Historical discourse has to be built up in the form of a set of works. Each work gets inserted into an already existing environment. Rereadings of the past are in this way reconstructions, at the price sometimes of costly demolitions: construct, deconstruct, reconstruct are familiar gestures to the historian’ (211).

To bring the optical metaphor into focus, Ricoeur states that history, too, ‘functions in turn as an eyepiece, a microscope, or a telescope’ (211). With the notion of scale used by historians, however, commensurability of dimensions is absent. ‘In changing scale, one does not see the same things as larger or smaller, in capital or lower case letters... One sees different things’ (212). On the terrain of the historian, scales cannot be reduced for there are ‘different concatenations of configuration and causality’ (212).

Based on this understanding of the variations in scale Ricoeur critiques the history of mentality for its methodological deficiency – a methodology that did not take account of changes in scale.

2.3.4. From mentality to representation

The discussion up to this point has left the historical field in a state of confusion. On the one hand we have dealt with rigorous advocates aiming at reassembling a burst-apart history; on the other hand we have seen a historiography apparently in opposition to the implicit dominant historiography of the *Annales* school, drawing sturdily on micro-history. Ricoeur now attempts to reorder the historical field by means of a conceptual leap, ‘one where the history of mentalities will play a federating role on the condition of assuming the title and function of a history of representations and practices’ (216). He aims at replacing the fuzzy concept of mentality with that of representation, showing that it is a well articulated and

dialectical concept in perfect coherence with the uses he is about to propose concerning the generalised concept of a variation in scale (217).

Ricoeur explains that what is important in the play of scales is not so much the privilege granted to the choice of some scale 'so much as the very principle of a variation in scale...' (218) and the variety of effects that can then be attributed to the exercising of these variations. Ricoeur suggests the variation in scale by drawing on three converging lines. He explains: 'To the first of these, I would attribute the variations affecting the degrees of efficacy and coerciveness of social norms; to the second, those variations modulating the degrees of legitimation at work in the different spheres to which one can belong among which the social bond is distributed; and to the third, the non-quantitative aspects of the scale of social times, something that will lead us to rework the very idea of social change that presided over our whole inquiry concerning the explanation/understanding practiced in history' (218). These three lines will now be explained, keeping in mind that each scale opens up the possibility of seeing things that are not visible at another scale.

The scale of efficacy and coerciveness

So far we have seen that the difference between micro-history and macro-history lies on the plane of shifts of accent: micro-history emphasises the 'individual, familial, or group strategies that call into question the presupposition of submission by social actors on the bottom rank to social pressures of all kinds, and principally those exercised on the symbolic level' (218). Ricoeur argues that a focus on history that goes beyond the macro-historical shows a complex entanglement between the pressure exerted by dominant models of behaviour, on the one hand, and the reception and appropriation of received messages, on the other (219). However, even systems opposing high to popular culture and their associated pairings (force/weakness, authority/resistance) fall apart, for the opposites thereof are circulation, negotiation, and appropriation that ask for the whole complexity of social action to be taken into account. The macro-historical is therefore not abolished by merely deviating from it, as it is still high-order systems – only now, they are considered from below (219). The problematic force that needs to be dealt with is 'unperceived agreements and agreement concerning the modes of agreement' (219). For Ricoeur, the task is 'to place these guiding concepts in a dialectical relation to those governing the appropriation of these rules of agreement about agreement' (219).

He consequently examines the major uses of the idea of an institution – ‘as juridical-political, as an organisation functioning in a regular manner; as an organisation in the broad sense tying together values, norms, models of relations and behaviours, roles’ (220). These, he argues, lead to the idea of regularity. A dynamic approach to the constituting of the social bond will therefore overcome the contingent opposition between institutional regularity and social inventiveness. Ricoeur argues that ‘the process of institutionalisation brings to light two faces of the efficacy of representations: on the one hand, in terms of identification – the logical, classificatory function of representation; on the other hand, in terms of coercion, of constraint – the practical function of establishing conformity in behaviour’ (220). Institutions create identities and constraints, and, ‘(c)onsidered from a dynamic point of view, the process of institutionalisation oscillates between the production of nascent meaning and the production of established constraints’ (220).

The idea of a scale of efficacy and coercion opens up the possibility of questioning the orders of identification and the qualifying of behaviour. Ricoeur proposes that the figures of the just and the unjust can be taken to be the basis for opposed evaluations (221).

The scale of degrees and legitimation

The second line explored by Ricoeur concerns ‘the degree of social status that social agents may claim in the order of public esteem’ (221). He relates the concept of justification to status and esteem arguing that ‘(o)ne becomes great when, in a context of discord, one feels justified in acting in the way that one does’ (221). This issue is connected to the discussion above on the grounds of the search for identity that is attached to the establishment of the social bond and the relevance it has for the reorganising of the historical field. Ricoeur identifies the basic question as follows: ‘How to justify disagreement and manage agreement, principally by means of compromise, without giving in to violence?’ (221). Status and recognition are clearly at play here, although a component of intelligibility should also be added considering the plurality of regimes of justification resulting from the plurality of types of conflict (221). High status differs between commerce, politics and aesthetics.

Here the hierarchical idea of status is thus joined to the horizontal line of pluralisation of the social bond whereby the idea of a common mentality is destroyed. This is not to be

confused with an idea of destroying common humanity. What in fact happens is that the notion of dissimilarity is added to that of common humanity. This, however, remains a risky and uncertain business as no neutral, external or superior measuring point exists.

The first problem Ricoeur identifies with justification, and that is, according to him, relevant for a history of representations, is the finite character of the regressive process that from elementary justifications to secondary justifications reaches an ultimate justification. 'The problem, once again,' he states, 'is not of a taxonomic order, but one of hierarchy in estimation' (222). The issue is not with order itself, but with the fact that a certain ranking is inherent to the order. The second difficulty Ricoeur identifies concerns authentication: he asks what discourse, in the end, authenticates the final justification appropriate to a certain context. He critiques the use of the works of philosophers, theologians, politicians and writers as providing the founding discourses for actual discourse in everyday disputes, and asks what the fit is between these founding discourses and the ones they justify.

Ricoeur concludes that there is continuity between the 'idea of representation as an object of history and that of representation as a tool of history' (223).

The scale of non-quantitative aspects of social times

In the last of the proposed scales Ricoeur recognises that there are non-quantitative aspects of the temporal component of social change. He argues that the idea of long, middle, and short time spans draws on quantitative relations. It is implied by measurable intervals like centuries, decades, days, and hours. It is furthermore correlated by calendars to create repetitions that can be quantified by statistics and treated as facts. However, Ricoeur argues that, within the framework of what is measurable, there are also things, such as the speed of or acceleration of changes that are experienced. The intensity of these things is expressed through 'rhythm, cumulativeness, recurrence, persistence, and even forgetting...' (224). Although the usefulness of this scale should be recognised, the problem is that the scale only allows for 'available competencies of social agents' (224).

Ricoeur therefore proposes that the plurality of the worlds of action should also be crossed with regards to temporal regimes. This implies that the very notion of regularity stops being taken for granted (224). It does not mean that deviation should be privileged above structure, for example, because thereby the historian would reinforce his/her discipline over

and against sociology which focuses on stable features (225). This goes for the categories of stability and instability, and continuity and discontinuity. However, Ricoeur regards these categories on a different level as that of social change. He argues that social change should be seen as the metacategory to which the other opposed pair just named function together as the opposite pole. Such an approach provides not only for instability as a mode of social change, but also stability.

As has been stated before, when it comes to scales the accent has to be placed on the variation in scale and not on a supposed privilege of one or another scale. This variation allows for structured hierarchies of power relations to be surpassed.

2.3.5. Representation as a dialectical concept

In this section we have followed Ricoeur's argument that "representation" is an apt term to use in historiography after the shift that took place during the last third of the twentieth century. To support his own preference for the concept of "representation" over that of "mentality", Ricoeur summarises the inadequacies of the latter (in hindsight of the discussion above) as follows:

'With regard to the variations in efficacy and constraint, the old notion of mentalities appears to be unilateral due to lack of a corresponding term on the side of receivers of social messages; with regard to the variations in the process of justification at work across the plurality of cities and worlds, the notion of mentality appears undifferentiated, due to the lack of a plural articulation in social space; and finally with regard to the variety equally affecting the least quantifiable modes of temporalisation of social rhythms, the notion of mentality seems to operate in a heavy-handed fashion, like the quasi-immobile structures of the long time span, or of cyclic conjunctures, the event being reduced to a function that indicates a break. Therefore, over against the unilateral, undifferentiated, massive idea of mentality, that of representation expresses better the plurivocity, the differentiation, and the multiple temporalisation of social phenomena' (227).

However, Ricoeur is critical of the concept of representation being a 'rule-governed exploration of phenomena' (227) and warns that, if used incorrectly, it 'runs the risk of signifying too much' (228). He therefore sets out to narrow 'the gap between the notion of representation as an object of the historian's discourse' (228) and the other uses of the same concept that we come across in studying the current work of Ricoeur. In the section to

come we will deal with the concept of representation as ‘the transferring of explanation/understanding to written words’ (228). The concept is ambiguous because it can refer to both the historian’s represented object, and a phase of the historiographical operation, the operation of representing.

By way of a hypothesis Ricoeur shows how these two uses of the concept are connected: ‘Does the historian, insofar as he does history by bringing it to the level of scholarly discourse, not mime in a creative way the interpretive gesture by which those who make history attempt to understand themselves and their world?’ (228-229). If this is so, Ricoeur holds, there would indeed be ‘a mimetic relation between the operation of representing as the moment of doing history, and the represented object as the moment of making history’ (229). Here Ricoeur skilfully relates the current discourse on representation with that found at the beginning of his work dealing with the phenomenology of memory. The faithful representation of the past comes to the fore again. The discussion on the phenomenology of memory, drawing on Plato and Aristotle, proposed one key for the interpretation of the mnemonic phenomenon: ‘the power of memory to make present an absent thing that happened previously’ (229). From this Ricoeur argues that presence, absence, anteriority, and representation form the first conceptual chain of the discourse about memory, and furthermore that the faithfulness of memory precedes that of truth by history (229).

The “making present” that takes part in the historiographical operation should therefore not be regarded as obvious. What in fact happens is that an absent thing is evoked through the intervention of a substituted thing that is its representative by default (230). Furthermore, the absent thing exhibited as a presence before the eyes overshadows ‘the operation of substitution that is equivalent to an actual replacement of what is absent’ (230). A critical reflection of this process is necessary as it is submitted to discrimination, differentiation, mistakes, and misunderstandings. A wide spectrum of uses and abuses opens up in this way, ‘resulting from the priority accorded to the visibility belonging to the image over its oblique designating of the absent’ (230).

It is to a conscientious reflection of historian’s representation that we now turn.

2.4. The historian's representation

As already mentioned earlier, this phase does not refer only to the writing of history. History is writing through and through – writing takes place from the level of writing documents in the archives to the historian's texts being published and presented for the readers of history (234). The historian's representation is thus the way in which history moves into the public sphere where it becomes accessible to all. Ricoeur explains this process well:

‘Pulled by the archive out of the world of action, the historian re-enters that world by inscribing his work in the world of his readers. In turn, the history book becomes a document, open to the sequence of re-inscriptions that submit historical knowledge to an unending process of revisions’ (234).

This explains the unfinished project of history in a striking way. This final inscription of history, furthermore, indicates that it indeed belongs to the domain of literature. Ricoeur proposes that we speak, together with De Certeau, of “scriptural representation” or literary representation.

Together with the fact that this phase does not refer only to writing, it is important to note that it neither refers merely to interpretation. Interpretation takes place at all levels, and therefore also, but not only, at the level of literary representation. Ricoeur calls this phase neither the “writing of history” nor “interpretation” but rather “representation” because ‘it indicates the continuity of a single problematic from the explanatory to the scriptural or literary phase’ (235) as we saw in the previous chapter where representation was shown to be the privileged object of explanation/understanding.

The term “representation” moreover lays bare the connection between history and memory. Following Plato and Aristotle, it is in terms of representation that the phenomenology of memory ‘described the mnemonic phenomena in that what is remembered is given as an image of what previously was seen, heard, experienced, learned, acquired’ (235). The connection between historical representation and mnemonic representation is obvious in this regard. However, it is this fundamental correlation which has the most profound implication for our analysis of the historian's representation: ‘literary

or scriptural representation must in the final analysis allow itself to be understood as “standing for” (236).

On his way to explaining representation as “standing for”, Ricoeur sets out the resources of representation by way of a discussion on “representation and narration” and “representation and rhetoric.” Until now he has not given significant attention to the contribution of narrative to historical discourse because of the deadlock caused by both the partisans and adversaries of history as narrative. This deadlock is caused by the opposition in which narrative configuration and causal explanation are placed against each other. Narrative configuration is seen as an alternative explanatory mode opposed to causal explanation; and problem-oriented history is seen to have replaced narrative history. However, in both cases narrative is equivalent to explaining, whereas Ricoeur uses narrative in this phase of the historical operation as representation. When staging a narrative, a selection is made with regards to figures of style and thought because the writer is concerned with persuasion by means of rhetorical resources – hence the section on representation and rhetoric in Ricoeur’s work.³⁰

As a result of the prominence of the notion of narrative and rhetoric in the third stage of the historiographical operation, we are again compelled to face the challenge concerning the relation between historical discourse (or the historian’s representation) and fiction (or the prestige of the image) head on. Here Ricoeur discusses the immense realm ‘of that other than the real’ (237) and the concern for visibility in the search for a readability proper to narration’ comes to the fore for the first time.

The main themes introduced above will now be dealt with in more detail.

2.4.1. The historian’s representation as narrative and as rhetoric

In discussing the place of narrativity in the architecture of historical knowledge, Ricoeur states that although narrativity is not an alternative to explanation/understanding (as some advocate), emplotment does constitute a genuine component of the historiographical operation, albeit on another plane than the one concerned with explanation/understanding

³⁰ In this sense *Memory, History, Forgetting* goes beyond *Time and Narrative*. Ricoeur states that the resources of rhetoric were not distinguished from those of narrativity in his earlier work. Here he presents an effort to disentangle the rhetorical from the properly semiotic aspects of narrativity.

(238). Initially narrativity was closely linked to the idea of event-oriented history where the singularity and brevity of the event constitute history. Opposed to this idea is the idea that history should include the whole human phenomenon with a strong emphasis on economic and social conditions (in opposition to an emphasis on battles and events) (240). The main opposition is thus between 'the instant' and 'time that takes a long time to unfold' (240). In opposition to the idea of the historical event as a unique event, the notion of "serial history" developed. But if narrative is seen as a collection of point-like events, it still does not move away from the idea of event-oriented history. The problem with the narrativist approach is that it tends to deny the conflict between explanation/understanding and interpretation.³¹ Ricoeur explains that for such an approach, 'to understand a narrative is thereby to explain the events that it integrates and the facts it reports' (241). The critical question posed by Ricoeur is 'at what point the narrativist interpretation accounts for the epistemological break that has occurred between told stories and history built on documentary traces' (241). For this break narrativistic history cannot give an account.

A subsequent question arises, one that we faced numerous times before, namely, on what basis can we distinguish between history and fiction if both narrate? The argument that history, in contrast to fiction, narrates the truth does not hold, for one has to acknowledge that historians very often construct opposing narratives about the same events. Furthermore, 'is there any meaning in saying that two historians give different narratives of the same events?' (242). Ricoeur, rather than playing off the adversaries and partisans of the explanatory relevance of narrative as a configuring act against each other, identifies two types of intelligibility that are of explanatory relevance to us, namely narrative intelligibility and explanatory intelligibility (243). He examines how these two types of intelligibility go together.

With regards to narrative intelligibility, Ricoeur proposes the complex notion of "narrative coherence." Ricoeur argues that this notion must be distinguished from, on the one hand, the "cohesion of a life" (as proposed by Dilthey), and, on the other hand, 'from the notion of a causal or teleological connection arising from explanation/understanding' (243). This

³¹ Ricoeur summarises the successive theses of the narrativist school in *Time and Narrative I*, 155-174.

distinction allows for what Ricoeur calls 'a synthesis of the heterogeneous' (243). He explains it as

'the coordination between multiple events, or between causes, intentions, and also accidents within a single meaningful unity. The plot is the literary form of this coordination. It consists in guiding a complex action from an initial situation to a terminal one by means of rule-governed transformations that lend themselves to an appropriate formulation within the framework of narratology' (243).

The concept of narrative coherence has two important implications. The first is that it provides a 'properly narrative definition of the event' (243) where the notions of plot and event are combined. The second implication is that of narrative identification. Ricoeur explains that the 'notion of a character constitutes a narrative operator of the same amplitude as that of an event' (244).

This being said, Ricoeur sets out to connect the notion of "narrative coherence" to "causal or teleological explanation" (244). He states that it would be futile to 'seek a direct tie between the narrative form and the events as they actually occurred; the tie can only be indirect by way of explanation and, short of this, by way of the documentary phase, which refers back in turn to testimony and the trust placed in the word of another' (244).

Although rhetoric and narrative are in some sense entangled, Ricoeur regards it as necessary to deal with the rhetorical aspect of historical representation properly. Following the argument posed by those following the methodological revolution in France, headed by Ferdinand de Saussure, Ricoeur states that, for them, the similarity of the narrative code and the general structural properties of the system of language results in the 'extending of linguistics to the semiotics of narrative' (249).³² Ricoeur challenges this argument by asking whether this linguistic model is appropriate to historical discourse (250). The issue is that of the referent in historiography. Ricoeur argues that to come to grips with and to give an account of the specificity of referentiality in the historiographical domain, we have to 'pass through the documentary proof, the causal and teleological explanation, and the literary emplotment' (250). It is an urgent matter to 'specify the referential moment that

³² Ricoeur gives a detailed explication of this in *Time and Narrative II* under the heading "The Semiotic Constraints on Narrativity."

distinguishes history from fiction (253). To do this, Ricoeur argues, we cannot stay within the confines of literary forms.

The inadequacy of literary forms is best seen in what Ricoeur calls the limits of representation. The Holocaust, being the most prominent reality that confronts us with limits, asks of us to reflect on 'both the singularity of a phenomenon at the limit of experience and discourse, and the exemplarity of a situation where not only the limits of representation in its narrative and rhetorical forms, but the whole enterprise of writing history, are open to discover' (254).

2.4.2. The problematic of the image

By now the problematic issue of the relation between historical discourse and narrative has been sufficiently introduced and we are well aware of it. Even so, Ricoeur probes deeper into it, referring to it as the 'iconic dimension of the historian's representation' (261). With the term "image", 'an aporia comes to the fore that has its place of origin in the iconic constitution of memory itself' (261). We are faced again by the initial problem.

Ricoeur describes it in a new way here. He states that what distinguishes historical narrative from fictional narrative is the implicit contract between the writer and the reader. By way of this contract the reader expects certain things and the writer promises others. When reading fiction the reader agrees to play along as if the things recounted did not happen. On the contrary, the reader of history expects to encounter an account of event(s) that really occurred, and furthermore casts a critical eye on the honesty and trustworthiness of the text. It thus seems, at least in principle, as if confusion between the two kinds of narratives is not admissible.

Nevertheless, Ricoeur argues that 'despite the distinction in principle between "real" past and "unreal" fiction, a dialectical treatment of this elementary dichotomy imposes itself through the fact of the interweaving of the effect exercised by fictions and true narratives at the level of what we call the "world of the text,"³³ the keystone to a theory of reading'

³³ In *Time and Narrative 2*, Ricoeur defines the "world of the text" as 'a world we might inhabit and wherein we can unfold our ownmost potentialities' (1985: 101).

(262).³⁴ In *Time and Narrative* 3, Ricoeur explains that this interweaving exists only because 'history and fiction each concretise their respective intentionalities only by borrowing from the intentionality of the other' (1988: 181). The fictionalisation of historical discourse is now reformulated as the interweaving of readability and visibility at the threshold of the historian's representation, and it is the 'interwoven connection of the readability and visibility at the level of the reception of the literary text' (2004: 262) that should be examined. Ricoeur holds that a narrative gives itself to be understood and seen. To tell history is therefore to show it, and vice versa. 'A chiasmus is established that makes the picture speak and the narrative show, each mode of representation finding its most specific, its ownmost effect in the domain of the other' (267).³⁵

Inherent to all of this, however, are subtle (or not so subtle) suggestions of the influence that power, glory, greatness, and praise have on the narratives and images used in the writing of history. 'Has greatness abandoned the political field? And must and can historians renounce the discourse of praise with its vanities?' (271). These are the critical questions posed by Ricoeur – questions that are yet to be answered.

2.4.3. History as “standing for”

The literal or scriptural representation that we have studied thus far should, in the final analysis, be understood as “standing for” (236). This is the focus of the last section of this chapter, and in a sense what this whole chapter and the third phase of the historical operation are about. “Standing for” is ultimately what the expectations, demands and aporias of the historian's intention are all about. “Standing for” is linked to the contract that exists between the author and the reader as explained above in the sense that it poses the question of 'whether, how, and to what degree the historian satisfies the expectation and

³⁴ In volume 3 of *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur deals with the “interweaving of history and fiction” (chap. 8) after having considered them separately in chapter 5 (“Fiction and its imaginary variations on time”) and chapter 6 (“The reality of the past”). Ricoeur describes the purpose of the book as a direct scrutinising of the relationship between narrative and time without any regard for memory.

³⁵ For this reason, Ricoeur holds, we can say that one reads a painting. He, furthermore, states that a medal 'is the most remarkable procedure of iconic representation capable of telling by showing. Unlike the drawing that illustrates a text, or even a tapestry, which most often only represents one moment of history, the medal is a portrait that... offers an abbreviation of a picture. By presenting something to be seen, the medal... thanks to its gold and its brilliance depicts the flash of glory. What is more, the medal, like a coin, can be sown, touched, exchanged. But above all, thanks to its hardness and the fact that it lasts, it grounds permanence of memory by transforming the passing flash of the exploit into perpetual glory' (267).

promise conveyed by this contract' (275). After all, the writer and reader of a historical text agree 'that it will deal with situations, events, connections, and characters who once really existed, that is, before the narrative of them is put together...' (275). Ricoeur makes two statements with regards to this question. First, it is paradoxical that it is at this stage, when the historian seems best equipped to honour the intention of representing the past, that the suspicion that the promise has not and cannot be kept is most prominent. Second, it is important to keep in mind that the suspicion of betrayal does not 'lie only in the moment of literary representation but rather in its articulation in terms of the two prior moments of explanation/understanding and of documentation, and, if we move back even further, in the articulation of history in the basis of memory' (275). The work of the historian in the documentary and explanation/understanding phases is not complete before it is communicated through writing to a public of readers. It is therefore in the historian's representation that we can see whether he/she is keeping the promise made to the reader. As Ricoeur summarises, 'the whole movement that carried explanation/understanding toward literary representation, and the whole internal movement of representation that displaced readability toward visibility, are both clearly meant to remain in the service of the transitive energy of the historian's representation' (276).

Why this suspicion about the historian's representation? The problematic of the distinction between truth and fiction comes into play again. The narrative which the historian constructs makes use of the same literary forms and styles as the writer of fictions. As Ricoeur explains, '(t)he narrative form, in giving the narrative a closure internal to the plot, tends to produce a sense of ending, even when the narrator, in misleading the readers' expectation, undertakes to deceive them through strategies aimed at a kind of non-ending' (276). The strategies used in representing are in itself suspicious. '(T)he literary modes said to persuade the reader of reality, conjunctures, structures, and events set on stage become suspect of abusing the reader's confidence by abolishing the boundary between persuasion and making believe' (277).

If this is the case, how can we trust the historian's representation whatsoever? Ricoeur reflects on the whole of the historiographical operation, and gives a profound answer to this question:

‘(O)nce the representative modes supposed to give a literary form to the historical intentionality are called into question, the only responsible way to make the attestation of reality prevail over the suspicion of non-pertinence is to put the scriptural phase back in its place in relation to the preliminary ones of comprehensive explanation and documentary proof. In other words, it is together that scripturality, comprehensive explanation, and documentary proof are capable of accrediting the truth claim of historical discourse. Only the movement that moves back from the art of writing to the “research techniques” and “critical procedures” is capable of raising the protest to the rank of what has become a critical attestation’ (278).

Ricoeur states that at the heart of all of this lies the testimony of the witness on which the whole historiographical operation is built. As argued in the phenomenological study of memory, without testimony, which is fuelled from our memory, we have no link to the past. Ricoeur furthermore argues that the seed of criticism, that is the ability to question, is also implanted in testimony. Therefore ‘we have nothing better than testimony and criticism of testimony to accredit the historian’s representation of the past’ (278).

Up to now, the notion of truth has not been discussed in detail. However, it is important to consider what the word “truth” adds to the word “representation.” Ricoeur argues that it is history’s claim to truth that commits it to a relationship with both memory and with other sciences. What criteria are used to determine the truth of history? It is quite evidently the past itself. Representation is regarded as truth when it *stands for* the past. Or if we formulate it in the way Ricoeur uses the words of Ranke: if history is to show events as they really happened, then ‘(t)he “as” of Ranke’s formula... designates nothing other than what (Ricoeur) calls the function of standing for. The “really” past remains then inseparable from the “as” really happened’ (279).

At the very end of this epistemological excursion, we meet an ontological question. In Ricoeur’s words: ‘the historian’s representation is indeed a present image of an absent thing; but the absent thing itself gets split into disappearance into and existence in the past. Past things are abolished, but no one can make it be that they should not have been’ (280). Between the “something that no longer is” and the “has been” we are confronted with a historical condition – ‘this realm of existence placed under the sign of a past as being no longer and having been’ (280). This will be the focus of our discussion in the next section.

3. Forgetting: on the historical condition

The discussion above of the epistemology of the historiographical operation, constituted by the documentary, explanation/understanding, and historical representation phases, is now being confronted by a reflection on the 'conditions of the possibility' (Ricoeur, 2004: 283) of such a discourse. This examination is essentially a hermeneutic³⁶ one in which we ask what it is to understand in the historical mode. The analysis can be divided into two areas: the critical and the ontological. The critical reflection is aimed at 'imposing limits on any totalizing claim attaching to historical knowledge (283)'. The critique is specifically focused on the discourse of 'history in-itself knowing itself' (283). The ontological reflection is a hermeneutical task of exploring the presuppositions that can be called existential. Ricoeur explains that these presuppositions 'are existential in the sense that they structure the characteristic manner of existing, of being in the world, of that being that each of us is' (283). It concerns first and foremost, Ricoeur holds, 'the insurmountable historical condition of that being' (284).

Ricoeur argues that the coherence of the hermeneutical enterprise rests on the necessity of the twofold passage from historical knowledge to critical hermeneutics and from critical hermeneutics to ontological hermeneutics (284).

Part of the historical condition, and part of the historiographical exploration as a whole, is the phenomenon of forgetting. Ricoeur regards it as having the same scope as the other two phenomena (memory and history) relating to the past. However, Ricoeur does not regard forgetting as only being an enemy of memory and history, but argues for a reserve of forgetting 'which can be a resource for memory and history...' (284). The notion of forgetting features only at the end of the discussion on the historical condition as it is the 'emblem of the vulnerability of the historical condition taken as a whole' (284).

³⁶ Hermeneutics taken in the most general sense: 'examining the modes of understanding involved in forms of knowledge whose aim is objectivity' (Ricoeur, 2004: 283).

3.1. History and the non-historical: history as a burden

To start off the discussion on historical being we should ask, with Ricoeur and Nietzsche, whether we should merely accept the fact that we are historical. Nietzsche, for one, was very critical about this, as seen in his influential essays collected in *Untimely Meditations*. It is influential and unfashionable (or untimely) in the sense that it offers, in the face of the difficulties of an overwhelmingly historical culture, an exit from the historical only under the enigmatic sign of the non-historical (Ricoeur, 2004: 287). In one specific essay, *On the Utility and Liability of History for Life* (1874)³⁷, Nietzsche is concerned about a way to survive a triumphant historical culture such as his (and perhaps also our) own. He describes the historical culture we live in as a sick culture, and therefore one that is in need of a remedy. He, therefore, proposes the notions a-historical and supra-historical, and asserts that the “power to forget” is necessary to all action, describing it as the very power that allows the one possessing memory and history to ‘heal wounds, to replace what has been lost, to recreate broken forms out of itself alone’ (287). The connection which is made throughout the essay between historical culture and modernity is so strong that it can be regarded as anti-historicist and anti-modern in tone. However, Nietzsche himself recognises and admits the excessive nature of such an approach when he states: ‘that life requires the service of history must be comprehended, however, just as clearly as the proposition that will subsequently be proved – that an excess of history is harmful to life’ (287). The relation of history to life (and not to knowledge) is of utter importance to Nietzsche.

In this regard one may note the parallels between Nietzsche and Plato’s *Phaedrus*, and may also understand why Ricoeur uses both these texts as preludes to different parts of his work. Regarding Nietzsche’s text, Ricoeur states that ‘(e)verything... echoes the ambiguity of the *pharmakon*, oscillating between poison and remedy...’ (Ricoeur, 2004: 287). Nevertheless, there are definite differences, which boil down to the fact that Nietzsche is more concerned about historical culture than he is with the historical-critical method. Nietzsche proposes three kinds of history: monumental history, antiquarian history, and critical history. Ricoeur investigates these kinds of history through the lens of poison and remedy. It is important to note that Nietzsche’s categories of history are not epistemological

³⁷ The essay was originally published under the title “Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben” as the second part of his *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*.

in nature, as the discussion on history, following Ricoeur's argument, up to this level has been. Nietzsche shows how all three categories of history are essentially ambiguous, as they are at the same time a utility and a liability to life:

‘Insofar as it stands in the service of life history also stands in the service of an a-historical power... But the question about the degree to which life needs the service of history at all is one of the supreme questions and worries that impinges on the health of a human being, a people, or a culture. For at the point of a certain excess of history, life crumbles, and degenerates – as does, ultimately, as a result of this degeneration, history itself, as well’ (Nietzsche, 1873).

In a sense Nietzsche hereby paves the way for Ricoeur's discussion of forgetting and the way in which this phenomenon is explored in his work. As indicated by the title of Ricoeur's work, forgetting is on equal footing with memory and history. Ricoeur argues for a double valence for forgetting that consists, on the one hand, of forgetting as the rival of memory and history, and, on the other hand, of a reserve for forgetting.

3.2. A critique against objectivity and the absolute self-knowledge of history

Historical knowledge suffers from supposed self-sufficiency: absolute knowledge and the idea of objectivity. This is what Nietzsche would probably refer to as our sick historical culture, and its triumphant nature gave rise to his critique thereof. If history is so self-sufficient, it becomes a subject claiming that it possesses absolute knowledge about itself and therefore also the ability to study itself. The discussion to follow shall for that reason be ‘confined to the limits of a critique directed to the claim of the self-knowledge of history to be constituted as absolute knowledge, as total reflection’ (294). The critique is aimed at history constituted as a collective singular – “history itself” – but it also includes an evaluation of the idea that the present age – “our modernity” – ‘is considered not only different but preferable to any other’ (294). Ricoeur argues that the notions “our modernity” and “history itself” lead to similar aporia.

However, critical hermeneutics also opens up the positive measure of the limitations of history as will be seen in a discussion on the remarkable dialectics between judicial judgment and historical judgment. The impossibility of occupying the position of a third

party, the different paths of decision-making (trials and archives), and the particular use of testimony and proof will be illuminated in the setting out of the dialectic.

The shared horizon of these different discussions is the role of interpretation in history.

3.2.1. "History itself"

Ricoeur's critique is based on the work of Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (1985), where he points out the 'gap between the temporal models employed in the historiographical operation and the temporal categories of history' (296). The categories of time that Koselleck uses are historical time and internal time. Related to the categories of time are the concepts "space of experience" and "horizon of expectation", which show a striking parallel to the pair "present of the future" and "present of the past." According to Ricoeur, Koselleck insists that it is these categories that, epistemologically speaking, lay the foundation for the possibility of history, by attempting to define the notion of historical time. This is in effect an attempt at determining the contents of history. Moreover, the metahistorical categories of time proposed by Koselleck 'open a critical space in which history can exercise its corrective function with regard to memory' (296). Keeping Augustine's dialectic of the threefold past in mind, one discovers that history is not only a matter of the past, but history in fact 'opens the past of history onto a present of initiative and a future of expectation' (296-297). Koselleck's analyses provide categories that serve as conditions for discerning the changes affecting historical time themselves (297).

The term "progress" is an example of the opening of a horizon in which the "temporalisation of the experience of history" is the process of continual and increasing perfection. The notions of the acceleration and open-endedness of history fit this horizon too, and this in turn implies the availability and makeability of history that belongs to the agents of history and to the historians who make history available by writing it up (297). That history is makeable was unthinkable before the end of the eighteenth century. However, what we have to keep in mind is that the makeability of history supposes the makeability of histories. Attaching time to history becomes a difficult matter then, as '(t)here is a time of history (only) insofar as there is one single history' (298).

The concept of one single history is known as *history as a collective singular* and refers to the linking together of special histories under a common concept. This, however, contaminates history in a twofold manner: on the one hand it disregards history as a complex of events; and on the other hand it does not acknowledge that history is simultaneously knowledge, narrative and historical science. When history becomes a collective singular, the two conceptual events, as described above, amount to only one concept of history, namely “history as such” or “history itself” (*Geschichte selber*) (299). Although history as a collective singular bridges the great gap between unitary history and the ‘unlimited multiplicity of individual memories and the plurality of collective memories’ (299), it inevitably leads to history itself becoming its own subject. This probes us to ask whether the gap should, in fact, be bridged.

Ricoeur identifies a fault-line in ‘the presumed encompassing, totalizing idea of world history’ (301), as is suggested by longstanding ideas of history such as “philosophy of history” (Voltaire), “the idea of universal history from a cosmopolitan point of view” (Kant), “the philosophy of the history of humanity” (Herder), and “world philosophy” (Schiller) (300). His critique is based on his discontent with a history where ‘[h]umanity becomes both the total object and the unique subject of history, at the same time as history becomes a collective singular’ (300).

The first crack in the idea of a unified history of humanity is the phenomenon of *human plurality* which in itself produces a counter argument for history as a collective singular. Human plurality implies that the human phenomenon is fragmented, even dispersed. Although there is such a thing as humanity, there are also peoples – languages, mores, cultures, religions. The second challenge posed to universal history is related to the profession of the historian: on the one hand there are certain limits to the competence of the historian; on the other hand the historian is both a scholar and a citizen. This means that he/she simultaneously makes history in writing it, and in association with the other actors on the public stage.

Ricoeur identifies an ambiguity with regards to the epistemological status of the idea of world or universal history (302). He asks whether the notion of universal history is a regulative idea or a determinant idea. The former he explains, in the Kantian sense, would

require 'the unification of multiple forms of knowledge on the theoretical plane and proposing on the practical and political plane a task that could be termed cosmopolitan, aiming at establishing peace among the nation-states and at the worldwide dissemination of democratic ideals '(302). The latter, being a constitutive notion after the manner of the Hegelian *Idea*, would be one where the rational and the real coincide. Ricoeur then goes on to explain that '(a)ccording to the first acceptation (the regulative idea), history *has* to become universal, worldwide; according to the second, it *is* worldwide, universal, as the actual becoming of its own production' (302). In neither of these cases is there a place for human plurality. The idea of history as a collective singular (history as a whole) is only convincing when diversity, variety, and complexity are welcomed as components constituting this idea. Ricoeur hence calls for a properly dialectical concept of history that allows for the regulative and constitutive.

3.2.2. "Our" modernity

We can thus say that if history claims complete and absolute self-knowledge, it transgresses certain inherent limits. According to Ricoeur we have a clear example hereof in the phenomenon of modernity. In a critique against modernity Ricoeur explains that modernity 'consists in elevating as an absolute the historical present established as an observation point, even tribunal, for all the formations, especially cultural formations, that have preceded it. This claim is concealed under the seductive features of a concept that at first sight seems free of any tendency to transgress limits...' (305). He is particularly critical of modernity when we claim it as "our" modernity as if it, in its difference, has of itself a unique position in relation to the past. He, henceforth, poses the following question: 'how could "our" time think itself absolutely?' (305). We thus see that the exact opposite of the collective singular discussed above, namely the singular historical, is just as problematic. Favouring the "whole of History" is as problematic as favouring the "now of this historical present." According to Ricoeur, we are today confronted more with the latter than with the former. Nevertheless, Ricoeur does not imply that we can or should deny the existence of modernity:

'How indeed could we not be tempted to say in what times we live? Or to express our difference and novelty in relation to every other time? The only result expected from critique would then be an admission of the

controversial, polemical, inconclusive nature of all discussions on the “true” sense of “our” modernity’ (306).

Ricoeur does not deny the usefulness of studying, characterising, and comparing different epochs, but argues that the words we use to mark these epochs are not neutral. Furthermore, a fixed division of history into ancient, medieval, and modern does not fit well with the critique against time spans that we have dealt with so far. Ricoeur states that the ‘historian is a witness to this surplus of meaning that makes the superiority of “our epoch” fighting words’ (307). Ricoeur’s critique against modernity, unable to get away from falling into the discourse of “our” modernity, is thus that it, more often than not, designates a historical self-consciousness. He holds that no modernity exists apart from “our” modernity.

3.2.3. In search of a third party: Ricoeur’s comparison of the judge and the historian

Until now, the critique against history was with regards to the claim of the objectivity or its absolute self-knowledge. For Ricoeur this claim leads to the search of a third party – someone who stands outside of history and is therefore equipped to give an impartial account of it. To illuminate the impossibility of such a position, Ricoeur gives a remarkable comparison between the task of the historian and the task of the judge. He starts his comparison by asserting that both the judge and the historian attempt to occupy the position of the third party as they are equally concerned with truth and justice, and therefore they need to stand in a position different from that of the protagonists of social action. Attached to the third-party position is the vow of impartiality. However, it is important to note that it is not only the judge or the historian who are entitled to this position of impartiality. The educator who transmits knowledge and values in a democratic state, the state and its administration placed in the role of arbitrator, and even the citizen can claim that he/she/it is impartial (314). In view of these different role-players it becomes evident that the vow of impartiality must in fact be considered in light of the impossibility of such an absolute third party (314).

Following the argument of Thomas Nagel in *Equality and Partiality* (1991) Ricoeur explains impartiality as an ‘intellectual and moral virtue common to all those who would claim the function of a third party’ (314) by stating, on the one hand, that most of our experience of

the world and our desires belong to our individual points of view – we see things from here – and on the other hand, we are also able to think of the world in abstraction from our particular position. Ricoeur then asks to what extent the historian and the judge are capable of encompassing these rules of impartiality. And furthermore, ‘what social and personal, what personal and corporate forces’ (315) assist them in adhering to these rules?

It is with these questions in mind that we begin the comparison between the respective professions of judge and historian by identifying the starting point of the comparison as the structural difference between the trial conducted within the confines of the court and the historiographical critique begun within the framework of the archives (316). Ricoeur states that ‘(i)n both situations the same linguistic structure is involved, that of testimony... from its rootedness in declarative memory to its oral phase, and continuing up to its inscription in the mass of documents preserved and codified within the institutional framework of the archive by means of which an institution preserves the trace of its past activity with a view to subsequent consultation’ (316). When it comes to testimony, the judge and the historian are equally concerned with proof and with the critical examination of the credibility of witnesses; and this, furthermore, implies the importance of truth.

Two traits can be identified by which the scene of a trial can be compared to that of the historiographical investigation. The first is the deliberative phase which consists mainly of a ‘ceremony of language involving a number of protagonists; it rests on an assault of arguments in which the parties in opposition have equal access to speech...’ (319). It is an organised debate that takes place, and an event in which ‘the passions that fed the conflict are transferred into the arena of language’ (319) up to the point where the two lines of interpretation (of the victim and the perpetrator) converge, and the verdict falls. This is the second phase, the concluding phase, in which judgement is passed. Subsequently, Ricoeur argues that it is ‘the definitive character of the verdict [which] marks the most obvious difference between the juridical approach and the historiographical approach to the same events’ (319). But the passing of judgment is the function of a judge. The judge has to come to a conclusion and pronounce a verdict. Historians do not do this; in fact, they cannot do this. If they do so, it ‘would be at the cost of acknowledging the precariousness of a judgment whose partiality, even militancy, is recognised’ (320). The work of the historian is submitted to the critique of the ‘corporation of historians and to the critique of the

enlightened public' (320) and subjected to an 'unending process of revision, which makes the writing of history a perpetual rewriting' (320). Ricoeur argues that it is the openness to rewriting that marks the difference between the provisional historical judgment and a definitive judicial judgment (320). The judge closes circles, the historian pries them open again (321).

Why is the comparison between the judge and the historian such an important study to undertake? Is it merely an entertaining and stimulating conversation for academics? Ricoeur justifies his own effort in this regard by referring to the crimes committed in a number of places in the world by totalitarian or authoritarian regimes during the twentieth century. Historians and judges who judge these events (whether it is historical judgment or judicial judgment) are voices who partake in the (re-)establishment of constitutional democratic governments. Their judgments are therefore an integral part of the new foundations being laid. Ricoeur intensively discusses, on the one hand, 'the great criminal trials held at the end of the Second World War', and on the other, 'the controversy among German historians dealing, as responsible historians, with the same events related to this catastrophe' (322). He explains further:

'So, on one side we have the courts and the judges penetrating *volens nolens* into the territory of the historian before their verdicts are carved into the flesh of history as it is being made – on the other, historians who are attempting to do their job of historian under the pressure of a moral, legal, and political condemnation, arising from the same judicial agency as the verdict of the criminal court, a verdict they, in their run, risk reinforcing, attenuating, displacing, even subverting, because they cannot ignore it' (322).

This is called the 'secretly conflictual situation between the judicial approach and the historical approach' (322) which, because it cannot be untangled, should at least be made explicit. Ricoeur gives a detailed discussion of a work by Mark Osiel, *Mass Atrocity, Collective Memory, and the Law* (1997), that deals directly with this issue, and where the author aims to bring together the mindset of the sociologist and the mindset of the lawyer. Osiel 'proposes to determine the influence exerted on the collective memories of the people concerned by the judicial proceedings and the sentences pronounced by the great

criminal trials of the second half of the twentieth century in Nuremberg, Tokyo, Argentina, and France' (322).³⁸

These atrocities are held up as examples of events with an ethical uniqueness and incomparability because of the magnitude thereof. They were, furthermore, 'committed by the state itself on one selected part of society that had a right to safety and protection' and were 'carried out by a soulless administration, tolerated without notable objection by the leaders of the elite, endured without major resistance by an entire population' (326-327). All of this contributes to the bizarreness of the situation, and the necessity for it to be treated differently by both historians and judges. Ricoeur uses the words of Christian Meier, who summarised the task of historians facing events like these as follows: 'condemn and comprehend.'³⁹ 'In other words: comprehend without exonerating, without making oneself an accomplice to flight and denial. Comprehending involves making use of the categories of uniqueness and comparability in other than the strictly moral sense' (327). Reflecting on such events (of which the Holocaust is probably the most prominent), broadens but also further points out the problematic inherent to the task of the historian. The historical singularity of these events makes them particularly challenging as it asks for an analysis of its own when we submit it to the critical philosophy of history – the task in which we are involved here.

The comparison of the judge and the historian is mainly an endeavor to find an impartial yet not infallible third party. During the course of the discussion it became evident that the similarities of and difference between the task of the judge and the historian add to the problematic concerning the third party. It is, furthermore, apparent that both the judicial trial and the historiographical operation put the events of the past in view of the public eye, and in this way add a third partner to the pair formed by the historian and the judge, namely the citizen. 'The citizen emerges as a third party in the order of time: with a gaze that is structured on the basis of personal experience, variously instructed by penal

³⁸ Because of the intensity of this discussion I will not give a thorough summary of it here. However, Ricoeur explains the general line of the book as follows: 'unlike Durkheim, who saw in the unanimous condemnation of ordinary criminality a direct – mechanical – means of reinforcing social *consensus*, Osiel is drawn to the *dissensus* provoked by the trial's public proceedings and to the educational function exerted by this very *dissensus* on the level of public opinion and collective memory, which is expressed and shaped on this level' (323).

³⁹ Piper, ER (ed.). 1988. *Devant l'histoire: Les documents de la controverse sur la singularité de l'extermination des Juifs par le regime nazi*. Cerf: Paris. Translated by Brigitte Vergne-Cain et al, p 37.

judgment and by published historical inquiry... (T)he conviction of the citizen alone justifies the fairness of the penal procedures in the courts and the intellectual honesty of the historian in the archives' (333).

3.2.4. Interpretation as a dialectic between objectivity and subjectivity

We cannot speak about the internal limitations affecting history's reflection of its own project of truth without speaking about the notion of interpretation in history. Interpretation is the final internal limitation affecting history's reflection on its own project. Interpretation has been discussed before in relation to representation and there we have asserted that interpretation does not, as representation, signify a phase of the historiographical operation, but rather belongs to the second-order reflection on the entire course of this operation. Interpretation, furthermore, consists of a dialectical play between subjectivity and objectivity in history. What is underscored by this dialectic is what is described as the historian's twofold commitment: on the one hand, a personal commitment to the process of knowledge, and on the other, the historian's social and institutional commitment. The twofold commitment of the historian is necessary because of the twofold otherness that people of the past take on: the otherness of foreign and of past being, and the otherness of inscription (334).

Following the work done by Raymond Aron in his doctoral dissertation *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*⁴⁰, Ricoeur states that the dialectic can also be expressed as one of detachment and appropriation. In the words of Aron, Ricoeur argues that '(n)o such thing as a *historical reality* exists readymade, so that science merely has to reproduce it faithfully. The historical reality, because it is human, is *ambiguous* and *inexhaustible*' (334). This justifies the uncertainty of interpretation, but much more, it also justifies and emphasizes the freedom of the mind of the historian. According to Ricoeur, Aron proposes the concept of "imperfect objectification." He explains that '[h]istory is free because it is not written in advance, or determined as a sector of nature of fatality; it is unpredictable, as man is for himself' (335).

⁴⁰ Aron, R. 1961. *Introduction to the Philosophy of History: An Essay on the Limits of Historical Objectivity*. Beacon Press: Boston. Translated by George J. Irwin.

To further his argument, Ricoeur draws on the parallel work of Henri-Irénée Marrou, *The Meaning of History* (1966), where Marrou explains that historical knowledge places in relation ‘the past of the people who lived before and the present of those who live today.’ Marrou’s emphasis of subjectivity in historical knowledge ‘constitutes at one and the same time the condition and the limit of historical knowledge’ (336).

Taking into account the understanding of subjectivity and objectivity by Aron and Marrou, Ricoeur calls for “good subjectivity” together with Aron’s acknowledgment of “imperfect objectivity.” Ricoeur justifies the balance that needs to exist between subjectivity and objectivity by explaining that the difficulties which arise between interpretation and the quest for truth in history stem from the ‘temporal relation between the moment of the event and that of the narrative that reports it’ and not so much from ‘the inevitable intervention of subjectivity in history’ (336).

Regarding contemporary history, in which the above mentioned difficulty is particularly present, Ricoeur discusses the issue of the testimony of the living confronting the archival work, but in the case of the living being themselves survivors of the event considered. By drawing on René Rémond’s “Introduction” to *Notre siècle, 1918-1988*⁴¹, Ricoeur warns against two roles that are important to keep separate: that of the memorialist and that of the historian (336). The person attempting history of a too recent time lacks perspective and falls in the trap of ‘establishing a hierarchy of importance to evaluate people and events’ (336). It is at this point that interpretation and objectivity intersects. ‘The difficulty of forming a judgment is corollary of the difficulty of setting things into perspective’ (336-337).

When we speak of interpretation as a second-order reflection, we speak of it as an operation that is to be treated as a complex of language acts that are incorporated in the objectifying statements of historical discourse. This complex consists of several components that can be discerned: firstly, interpretation is concerned ‘with clarifying, specifying, unfolding a set of reputedly obscure significations in view of a better understanding on the part of the interlocutor’ (337). Secondly, it implies the ‘recognition of the fact that it is always possible to interpret the same complex in another way, and hence the admission of an inevitable degree of controversy, of conflict between rival interpretations’ (337). Thirdly,

⁴¹ René Rémond (in collaboration with J.F. Sirinelli), *Notre siècle, 1918-1988*, the final volume of the series *Histoire de France*, whose overall editor is Jean Favier (Paris: Fayard, 1988).

every specific interpretation should be endowed with 'plausible, possibly even probable, arguments offered to the adverse side' (337). Finally, 'the admission that behind the interpretation there always remains an impenetrable, opaque, inexhaustible ground of personal and cultural motivations, which the subject never finishes taking into account' (337). But it is important to remember that in this complex of components, utterances are those of an utterer, constituting the 'who of the acts of interpretation. It is this operation complex that can constitute the subjective side correlative to the objective side of historical knowledge' (337).

To draw our discussion on interpretation to a close: it is important to remember, as we have complied with right from the start, that interpretation takes place at every level and phase of the historiographical operation, and that this operation is unavoidably selective. It means that, when confronted with the limitation of interpretation in history, we are inevitably confronted with the intricacy and the obligation of truth in history. The operating complex explained above showed the correlation between subjectivity and the objectivity that is present in historical knowledge. We have been confronted with the 'impossibility of establishing the place of history within discourse; between science and literature, between scholarly explanation and mendacious fiction, between history-as-science and history-as-narrative' (340). The question that remains is how one is to 'go beyond the "either... or" that would result from a simple refusal to select one alternative' (340).

Drawing on Jacques Rancière's *The Names of History* (1994) Ricoeur states that Rancière sees 'historical discourse caught between the inadequacy of narrative to science and the annulling of this inadequacy, between a requirement and its impossibility' (341). Ricoeur then concludes that the 'mode of truth belonging to historical knowledge consists in the play between this indeterminacy and its suppression' (341). Truth in history relies then on a triple contract: 'scientific, which seeks the hidden order of laws and structures; narrative, which provides readability to this order; political, which relates the invisibility of the order and the readability of the narrative...' (341).

3.3. Heidegger, Being, and Temporality

In the discussion above we have dealt with Ricoeur's argument of hermeneutics from a critical point of view and accordingly assessed the notion of "history itself", whereby the limits of any claim to totalisation in history were established. At the same time the validity of a historiography aware of its limitations was explored. What remains now is for us to discuss ontological hermeneutics as addressed to the historical condition. What we have here is, therefore, a confrontation between the ontology of the historical condition and the epistemology of historical knowledge and, through it, with the phenomenology of memory (349). As soon as one speaks of ontology, the verb "to be" or "being" becomes part of the discussion and henceforth also Heidegger's influential work in this regard, *Sein und Zeit* (Being and Time) (1927). Ricoeur regards ontology ("to be" or "being") as having to do with "act" and with "power." In the light of our historical hermeneutic discussion he argues that the power to remember is a way of being, along with the 'power to speak, the power to act, the power to recount, the power to be imputable with respect to one's actions as their genuine author' (343-344).

Ricoeur's argument rests on the presupposition that the modes of being of things are not simply a given, but that the mode of being that we are in, is in each case distinguished from the other modes of being in terms of different manners of being-in-the-world (344). Heidegger's guiding idea in *Being and Time* is adopted to express the notion that temporality constitutes the major characteristic of the being that we are – temporality signals the relation of this being to being as being (345).

Heidegger's analysis of temporality is a useful starting point for a discussion on ontology as it articulates three temporal instances - the future, the past and the present – and the implicitness of all three instances in the phenomenology of memory and the epistemology of history. By these temporal instances Heidegger focuses on 'the capacity for an ontology of temporality to make possible, in the existential sense of possibility, the representation of the past by history and, before that, by memory' (346) It thus 'constitutes the existential precondition for the reference of memory and of history to the past' (347).

The tri-dimensionality of the temporality of the soul – past, present, future – is owed to Augustine. Although Augustine was adamant about the equal primordially of the three

instances, it is manifest that this equal primordially is distributed around a centre that is the present, which in turn shatters in three directions. The three times, past, present, and future, can be explained as follows: the present of past things is memory, the present of present things is direct perception, and the present of future things is expectation (352). Moreover, according to Ricoeur, Augustine and Koselleck argue that 'the past – the pastness of the past – is understandable in its distinct constitution only when paired with the future quality of the future and the present quality of the present' (346). Ricoeur continues to say that it is indeed remarkable 'that the phenomenology of memory and the epistemology of history rest unawares on a form of pseudo-self-evidence, according to which pastness is held to be immediately perceptible, in the absence of the future, in an attitude of pure retrospection' (346). Ricoeur argues against the bracketing of the future in the formulating of the past. This is why Heidegger's work is taken into consideration. He placed the main emphasis on the future, in contrast to the retrospective orientation of history and memory. But that is not all. He, furthermore, submitted the indefinite time of nature and of history that we find in the notion of future to the harsh law of mortal finiteness. He thus placed 'futureness under the sign of being-toward-death' (350).

This is radically different from what we have observed with regards to the investigation of the historical past. Up to now the historical past has implied three temporal positions: 'that of the target-event, that of the events interspersed between this event and the temporal position of the historian, and finally the moment of writing history' (347). But of these three dates, two are in the past and one in the present. Ricoeur uses the definition of history proposed by Marc Bloch, namely, "the science of men (sic) in time," but then argues further that, when it comes to history, men (and women) in time usually refer only to men and women of earlier times – having lived before the historian writes about them.

The hermeneutics of historical being thus proposes 'placing pastness into perspective in relation to the futureness of the present and the presence of the present' (347). Ricoeur argues that if temporality constitutes the existential precondition for the reference of memory and of history to the past, history ought to include the past, present, and future notions of temporality. Augustine referred to the threefold present: 'the present of the past which is memory, the present of the future which is expectation, and the present of the present which is intuition (or attention)' (347).

3.3.1. Being and dying

Ricoeur regards the ontology of the historical condition as being temporal in nature, and therefore confronts the law of mortal finiteness of indefinite time by discussing being-toward-death. He argues that the historian is not left speechless by confronting this seeming problematic in temporality.

Following Heidegger, Ricoeur uses the concept of Da-sein defined as “this being which we ourselves in each case are.” He distinguishes between a being/person who is undifferentiated with regards to being, and a being/person that ‘emerges out of its indifference and understands itself as that being who is concerned about its very being’ (354). Ricoeur, as Heidegger, chooses to work with the latter. When Heidegger discusses Da-sein and temporality he fuses two problematics: totality (the possible being-a-whole of Da-sein) and mortality (the existential project of an authentic being-toward-death). By “whole” is implied ‘not a closed system but integrality, and in this sense, openness. And openness always leaving room for what is “outstanding,” hence for unfinishedness’ (356). The “toward” of being-toward-death, on the other hand, implies some destination, some course completed. There seems to be some clash then between opening and closing.

However, in relating these arguments about being and dying to one’s own body, Ricoeur argues that the clash is not that odd. Death is the ‘ineluctable destiny of the object-body’ (358). One learns about it ‘in biology, confirmed by everyday experience; biology tells me that mortality constitutes the other half of a pair, of which sexual reproduction constitutes one half’ (358). Ricoeur holds that it is the flesh itself that prevents us from separating the modes of being. Still, at the primordial level the gap between wanting to live and having to die, remains: ‘the latter makes death an interruption, at once ineluctable and random, of the most primordial potentiality of being. Bridging this gap through acceptance remains a task we must all engage in, and one that we face up to more or less successfully’ (358).

Ricoeur does not only speak about death with regards to one’s own death, but also tries to understand death in the light of our manner of being among other humans (359). The death of others not only confronts us with the reality and finality of our own death, but teaches us about loss and mourning. Ricoeur holds that to lose a person ‘constitutes a genuine amputation of oneself to the extent that the relation with the one who has disappeared

forms an integral part of one's self-identity' (359). Mourning consists of being reconciled with the loss that one experiences. Ricoeur goes so far as to argue that, in mourning the death of others, we are able to await that which would crown the anticipated loss of our own life. We thus live to reconcile ourselves with the loss of our own lives in advance.

The significance of the historian's contribution to the meditation on death comes from the fact that we cannot ignore that 'in history one is concerned with practically nothing but the dead of other times' (364). The dead spoken of here may be prominent individuals who formed part of great events in history, or it may be the anonymous death of all those people who do no more than silently pass across the stage of history (365). They may furthermore be the dead who passed away *peacefully* or ones that suffered a cruel and violent death. Regarded in this way, however, 'the representation of the past as the kingdom of the dead seems to condemn history to offering to our reading no more than a theatre of shadows, stirred by survivors in possession of a suspended sentence of death' (365). But this is not all that history, or historiographical operation, is. Ricoeur strikingly proposes that the historiographical operation is the scriptural equivalent of the social ritual of entombment. He explains:

'Sepulchre, indeed, is not only a place set apart in our cities, the place we call a cemetery and in which we depose the remains of the living who return to dust. It is an act, the act of burying. This gesture is not punctual; it is not limited to the moment of burial. The sepulchre remains because the gesture of burying remains; its path is the very path of mourning that transforms the physical absence of the lost object into an inner presence. The sepulchre as the material place thus becomes the enduring mark of mourning, the memory-aid of the act of sepulchre' (366).

Writing is the sepulchre of historiography. It confirms the presence of the dead and of death in the midst of the living.

3.3.2. The historical mode of being

The connectedness of being and time is what keeps the critical ontological dialogue between the philosopher and the historian going. This connectedness is encapsulated by the concept *Geschichtlichkeit*⁴² (most aptly translated as "historicity") that signifies the notion of

⁴² Ricoeur sets off on a trajectory that describes the origin and meaning of the term *Geschichtlichkeit*. It is a nineteenth century creation which owns its philosophical signification to Hegel. It consists of a

history as the condition of historical being. This concept portrays the connectedness of life: a succession of experiences unfolding “in time.” “Within-timeness” thus becomes the important notion.

To explain the connection between being and time the philosopher is called to the workshop of the historian by focusing on the science of history, and the ambiguous senses of the word “history.” Following Heidegger, Ricoeur states the current acceptations of the term: the past as unavailable; the past as still acting; history as the sum of things transmitted; the authority of tradition (377). These explanations portray, once again, the dialectic between “having-been” and “being-no-longer.” But what is added to this dialectic now, is the idea of an environment. Ricoeur argues, at the hand of Heidegger, that ‘what we assemble under the idea of a trace would contain no mark of the past if we were not able to relate these indices to an environment that, although it has disappeared, nevertheless carries with it its having-been’ (377). Ricoeur identifies two connectors between the ontology of historical being and the epistemology of the historiographical operation: the succession of generations, borrowed from Dilthey; and repetition, received from Kierkegaard. In the case of the former the argument goes that it is through genealogy that the living being itself is instituted: life itself is not living; it is a human task to institute the living. Through institutions the thread of life is produced. ‘Genealogy is the institution that makes life human life’ (379). The theme of repeating, originating with Kierkegaard, is promising in the sense that it is ‘neither restoring after-the-fact nor re-actualizing: it is realizing anew’ (380). This means that repetition has the creative power of opening up the past again to the future. Ricoeur explains this as follows:

‘Understood in this way, repetition can be considered an ontological recasting of the gesture of historiography, seized in its most fundamental intentionality. Greater still, repetition allows us to complete and to enrich the meditation proposed above under the heading of death in history. This led us to the act of sepulchre by which the historian, providing a place for the dead, makes a place for the living. A meditation on repetition authorizes a further step, following the idea that the dead of the past once were living and that history, in a certain manner, moves closer to their having-been-alive. The dead of today are yesterday’s living, who were acting and suffering.’ (380)

twofold reference: on the one hand to Ancient Greece, and on the other to Christianity. Ricoeur continues to explain the contribution of Dilthey and Yorck in the developing of the concept. (Ricoeur, 2004: 370-376)

This view of repetition fits well with Ricoeur's expression of the "power" of the possible, and it is a suitable way to express the eventual convergence between the discourse on historicity and the discourse on history.

The dialogue between the philosopher and the historian continues in the face of "within-timeness" – being "in" time. This concept expresses the factuality of the history of historians, for it is indeed "in" time that events occur. People, therefore, do not only possess a manner of being-in-the-world; this being-in-the-world is furthermore temporal in nature, and it asks of us to continuously reckon with time. The temporality of being gives a public character to being. Temporality implies the possibility of datability, which is the capacity of time to be numbered.

The public character of being contributes to the discourse of history as it emphasises being in the form of social action and its capacity to produce the social bond and social identities. Here agents are brought to the fore that are 'capable of initiative and orientation, in situations of uncertainty, responding to constraints, norms, and institutions' (384). These agents become important when we take into account that the historian is not only concerned with the dead for whom she constructs a scriptural tomb; 'the historian does not only strive to resuscitate the living of the past who are no longer but who once were, but also attempts to re-present actions and passions... What history is concerned with is not only the living of the past, behind today's dead, but the actor of history gone by, once one undertakes to "take the actors themselves seriously"' (384-385).

3.3.3. The Relation between Memory and History

Up to this point the discourse on time and being has not said a word about memory. This raises (again) the question of the relation between history and memory. This time it is asked whether memory is just a province of history. The belated development of a history of memory makes it seem as if memory is merely one among many "new" objects of history, such as the body, cooking, death, sex, and festivals. Memory is seen as having an event-like nature where the problematic of the absence of the past and its representation in the present does not exist; neither do the difficulties concerning the truth claims of memory (386). Such a view of memory constructs a past that no one is able to remember. 'It is for a

history such as this, bound up with a “viewpoint free of all egocentrism,” that history ceased to be “part of memory,” and that memory has become “part of history” (388).

If this is the case when memory becomes a province of history, what then should the relation between memory and history look like? Should memory be in charge of history? Ricoeur argues that although the ‘rival claims of history and memory to cover the totality of the field opened up behind the present by the representation of the past’ is an unending debate, it does not end in a paralyzing aporia (392). Instead, the history of memory and the historicisation of memory can confront one another in an open dialectic.

3.4. The threat of losing the past: the phenomenon of forgetting

The phenomenon of forgetting scrutinises the long and detailed discussion on memory that we have had up to now. The reliability of memory is questioned in the face of forgetting being experienced as an attack on it. In the title of Ricoeur’s work, forgetting figures on an equal footing with memory and history, but we will henceforth see how memory is redefined as a struggle against forgetting. Ricoeur explains that the phenomenon of forgetting has the same scope as the two great classes of phenomena relating to the past discussed up to this point: the past has a twofold dimension, the mnemonic and the historical, and both of these are lost in forgetting. ‘Forgetting indeed remains the disturbing threat that lurks in the background of the phenomenology of memory and of the epistemology of history. Forgetting is, in this respect, the emblematic term for the historical condition... the emblem of the vulnerability of this condition’ (412). Forgetting is seen as an attack on the reliability of memory. ‘An attack, a weakness, a lacuna’ (413).

The way in which forgetting was treated until now is ambiguous as, on the one hand, memory is seen as the duty not to forget, a struggle against forgetting; but, on the other hand, we recoil from the phantom of a memory that would never forget anything. ‘We even consider it to be monstrous’ (413). This ambiguity implies that forgetting is not in every respect the enemy of memory, but that memory may have to negotiate with forgetting to find the right balance. Ricoeur asks a probing question: ‘Could a memory lacking forgetting be the ultimate phantasm, the ultimate figure of this total reflection that we have been combating in all of the ranges of the hermeneutics of the human condition?’ (413).

When we speak about forgetting it is important to keep in mind the discussion on memory until now, for forgetting prompts a rereading of the phenomenology of memory and the problematic involved therein. Ricoeur continuously distinguished between the cognitive approach to memory and the pragmatic approach. In the former, memory is apprehended in accordance with its aim of faithfully representing the past; the latter is concerned with the operative side of memory, its exercise, which necessarily includes the uses and abuses of memory (414). The discussion on forgetting takes us, furthermore, back to the very notion of Plato's tie of the *eikōn* to that of the *tupos* – the alleged tie between image and imprint. It again opens up the dialectic of presence and absence that lies at the heart of the representation of the past, and which challenges the reliability of memory. Ricoeur explains that the problematic of forgetting 'intervenes at the most critical point of this problematic of presence, of absence, and of distance, at the opposite pole from that minor miracle of happy memory which is constituted by the actual recognition of past memories' (414).

Addressing this problematic, Ricoeur identifies two figures of profound forgetting: forgetting through the erasing of traces; and backup forgetting, a sort of forgetting kept in reserve (414). Three sorts of traces have been distinguished up to this point: 'the written trace, which has become the documentary trace on the plane of the historiographical operation; the physical trace, which can be termed impression rather than imprint, impression in the sense of an affection left in us by a marking – or as we say, striking – event; finally, the cerebral, cortical trace which the neurosciences deal with' (415).

3.4.1. Forgetting as the effacing and persistence of traces

Ricoeur distinguishes between the physical trace and the cortical trace by way of the path needed to gain access to one or the other. He argues that the cortical trace is known to us only from the outside, through scientific knowledge – we cannot speak about our brains in the same manner that we can speak of our eyes or of our hands. We cannot think about our brains detached from them, as we can think about our hands or eyes. However, when it comes to physical traces the situation is entirely different. We speak of such traces retrospectively 'on the basis of precise experiences which have as their model the recognition of images of the past' (416). It is this distinction that renders possible the

distinction between forgetting as the effacing of traces and forgetting as the persistence of traces.

With regards to the former we will argue philosophically by drawing on neuroscience. The concept “mnestic” is used here in order to distinguish it from the concept “mnemonic” encountered in the phenomenology of memory. In the context of neuroscience forgetting involves the dysfunctions of mnestic operations that one finds ‘along the uncertain border between the normal and the pathological’ (418).

Why is the work of the neuroscientist important for the philosopher? Ricoeur emphasises the distance between the body as lived (the concern of the philosopher) and the body as object (the concern of the neuroscientist). The process of objectification, taken for granted by the neuroscientist, is a great problem for the philosopher of hermeneutical phenomenology. Ricoeur argues that one either speaks of neurons and so forth and thereby confines oneself to a certain language, or else talk about thoughts, actions, and feelings, tied to one’s body with which one is in a relation of possession and of belonging (420). Furthermore, we are not in our bodies as pilots of ships. Ricoeur argues in a noteworthy way:

‘The brain is remarkable in this respect: whereas I have a dual relationship with certain – sensorial, motor – organs, which allows me, on the one hand, to consider the eyes and hands as part of objective nature and, on the other hand, to say that I see with my eyes, grasp with my hands, I cannot say in the same manner, in accordance with the same sense of belonging, that I think with my brain. I do not know if it is contingent that the brain is insensible, but is a fact that I neither feel nor move my brain as an organ belonging to me. In this sense, it is entirely objective. I can appropriate it to myself only as something lodged in my cranial cavity, hence in the head which I honour and protect as the site of power, hegemony, in the upright position, in my manner of carrying myself and holding myself in the face of the outside world. The scientist may perhaps venture to say the human being thinks with his or her brain. For the philosopher there is no parallel between the two sentences: “I grasp with my hands,” “I understand with my brain”’ (420).

The philosopher and the scientist thus deviate from one another when it comes to the relation between organisation and function.

Does this mean that nothing else can be said about mnestic traces or that the phenomenologist and the neurologist have nothing to learn from each other? Definitely not,

for all traces are present to our minds. However, when it comes to mnemonic traces we also have to deal with the notion of trace in relation to elapsed time. And here we are once again faced with the aporia: 'How is it that such an inscription is itself present and yet also a sign of what is not present, of what existed previously?' (425). It implies that a trace is in itself something that needs to be deciphered and read, for 'a trace must... be conceived at once as a present effect and as the sign of its absent cause. Now, in the trace, there is no otherness, no absence. Everything is positivity and presence' (426). The representation of absence as distance is not possible where a function merely corresponds to an organisation, as is the case with mnestic traces. 'As concerns the mnemonic function, it is specified, among all other functions, by the relation of the representation to time and, at the heart of this relation, by the dialectic of presence, absence, and distance that is the mark of the mnemonic phenomenon' (426).

Ricoeur states that neuroscience approaches forgetting only in the context of dysfunctions, or as "distortions of memory" (426). But is this really the case? Is forgetting only a dysfunction, or a distortion? Ricoeur answers that it is indeed the case in certain respects. The matter of definitive forgetting, the effacement of traces, is the threat against which the work of memory is conducted. It is this misfortune of forgetting that the 'extraordinary exploits of the *ars memoriae* were designed to ward off... by a kind of exaggerated memorization brought to the assistance of remembering' (426). However, Ricoeur also argues that forgetting is bound up with memory, and that 'we cannot simply classify forgetting through the effacement of traces among the dysfunctions of memory alongside amnesia, nor among the distortions of memory affecting its reliability' (426). Ricoeur goes so far as to say that the idea of forgetting can be so closely tied to memory that it can be considered one of the conditions for it.

In what follows we will take a closer look at this condition of memory to which Ricoeur refers as a reserve of forgetting. Above, we have discussed external marks in the form of cortical traces, although we have noted that documentary traces can also be regarded as physical traces that can be destroyed in the same sense as mnestic traces. Still, a third sort of inscription remains. '(I)t consists in the passive persistence of first impressions: an event has struck us, touched us, affected us, and the affective marks remains in our mind' (427).

To clarify the discussion that is to come, Ricoeur discloses the presuppositions on which it rests.

The major presupposition is his contention that 'it is a primordial attribute of affections to survive, to persist, to remain, to endure, while keeping the mark of absence and of distance...' (427). This implies, Ricoeur argues, that these inscription-affections contain 'the secret of the enigma of the mnemonic trace: they would be the depository of the most hidden but most original meaning of the verb "to remain," synonym of "to endure"' (427). Recognition, that minor miracle of happy memory, is the best proof of this survival of affections. Ricoeur explains as follows:

'An image comes back to me; and I say in my heart: that's really him, that's really her. I recognize him, I recognize her. This recognition can take different forms. It takes place already in the course of perception: a being was presented once; it went away; it came back. Appearing, disappearing, reappearing. In this case the recognition adjusts – fits – the reappearing to the appearing across the disappearing' (429).

In this respect, Ricoeur argues, recognition is the mnemonic act par excellence and this multifaceted minor miracle proposes a solution, in the form of action, to the first enigma constituted by the present representation of an absent/past thing (430)⁴³. But here we are (again) faced with the reliability or unreliability of memory. Can recognition be wrong? 'Perhaps we have placed a foot in the wrong imprint or grabbed the wrong ring dove in the coop. Perhaps we were the victims of a false recognition, as when from afar we take a tree to be a person we know' (430). And yet Ricoeur argues that we know those moments of certainty attached to the pleasure of the sort of recognition we know in our hearts to be indubitable. 'Who could claim never to have trusted memory's finds in this way? (430).

But still recognition is only speculative. The argument is that the impression-affection remains, and because it remains, it makes recognition possible. But how do we know this? Ricoeur states that the presupposition is, in fact, entirely retrospective. Therefore he argues that 'something of the original impression has to have remained for me to remember it now. If a memory returns, this is because I had lost it; but if, despite everything, I recover it and recognize it, this is because its image had survived' (430). Later on he argues that we do

⁴³ Ricoeur's last work was written on the subject of recognition. Cf. Ricoeur, P. 2005. *The course of recognition*.

not perceive the survival of impression-affections, we presuppose it and we believe it. 'Recognition authorizes us to believe it: what we have once seen, heard, experienced, or learned is not definitely lost, but survives since we can recall it and recognize it. It survives. But where? This is the tricky question' (434).

The second presupposition is that this meaning is concealed from us by certain obstacles. These obstacles have already been discussed in the early parts of this chapter dealing with the uses and abuses of memory. In addition, the uses and abuses of forgetting will soon be discussed as the obstacles that conceal the meaning of traces.

Thirdly, 'there is no contradiction between the assertion concerning the capacity of the inscriptions-affections to remain and to endure and the knowledge of cortical traces' (428) although the ways of accessing them differ. The focus on affective traces does not deny the findings of neuroscience regarding cortical traces, and neither does it refute the serious deficits that continue to threaten our memory. The effacement of cortical traces remains central to this danger, and we continue to be aware of it. Even the importance of the correlation between organisation and function is upheld as it continually sustains our corporeal condition. The basic structure of neuroscience is kept in place, but at the same time it is acknowledged that there are two heterogeneous types of knowledge with regard to forgetting: 'an external knowledge and an intimate knowledge. Each possesses its reasons for confidence and its motives for suspicion' (428).

And finally, the survival of images is to be considered as a fundamental form of forgetting – the reserve of forgetting. On what basis can we say that the survival of images is equivalent to forgetting? Ricoeur argues that memories' virtual nature, this nature's powerlessness, its unconsciousness, and its existence, does not cause oblivion, but forgetting in terms of a reserve or a resource (440). He further states that forgetting 'designates the *unperceived* character of the perseverance of memories, their removal from the vigilance of consciousness' (440). The equivocalness of forgetting then lies between the daily experience of the erosion of memory (the definite loss of memory; the death of memories) and the 'small pleasures of the sometimes unexpected return of memories we had thought lost forever' (440-441). The latter implies that we forget less than we think or fear.

We therefore have two figures of deep forgetting: the effacing of traces and the preserving of traces. This assists us in thinking and speaking about the past: we say that it is no longer, but that it has been (442). We affirm its disappearance and absence – we acknowledge that we do not hold it. But we also affirm ‘the complete anteriority of the past with respect to every event that is dated, remembered, or forgotten. An anteriority that is not confined to removing it from our grasp, as is the case of the past as expired, but an anteriority that preserves’ (442). Ricoeur hereby emphasizes the important point that no one can make it the case that what is no longer has not been. The forgetting that conditions remembering is related to the past as having-been, and accordingly ‘forgetting has a positive meaning insofar as having-been prevails over being-no-longer in the meaning attached to the idea of the past’ (443).

3.4.2. The uses and abuses of forgetting

We now return to the second presupposition that states, regarding the persistence of impression-affections, there are certain obstacles in the way of the persistence of traces. What becomes clear from the above stated is that memory and forgetting are so intertwined that certain ‘modalities of forgetting are revealed by the conjoined practice of memory and forgetfulness’ (443). Here our discussion will link up with the typology of the uses and abuses of memory, as was conversed earlier. It implies that we shift our focus from the ‘deepest layers of existence, where forgetting silently pursues at one and the same time its work of eroding and its work of maintaining’ (443) to the level where we become aware and cautious of the deception of forgetting in daily life.

The first obstacle to the persistence of traces adds to the reasons to believe that ‘forgetting through the effacement of cortical traces does not exhaust the problem of forgetting’ (444). Forgetting also manifests due to hindrances that block the access to the treasures buried in memory. This latches on to the pathological-therapeutic level discussed under the phenomenology of memory. Blocked memory is forgetful memory. The repetition that takes place instead of remembering amounts to forgetting – the traumatic event is prevented from becoming conscious. According to Ricoeur, what we learn from psychoanalysis here is that ‘the trauma remains even though it is inaccessible, unavailable,’ that ‘in particular circumstances, entire sections of the reputedly forgotten past can return’ (445), and

remembering, as a process of working-through, does not occur without the work of mourning. The thesis of the unforgettable is hereby maintained, and it furthermore supports the idea of the past which cannot be unmade. Ricoeur holds that it was one of Freud's strongest convictions that 'the past, once experienced is indestructible' (445).

Manipulated memory, the second obstacle, connects the problematic of memory with that of identity. The fragility of identity is linked to the opportunity to manipulate memory through ideology. Ricoeur argues that the abuse of memory is directly linked to the abuse of forgetting because of the mediating function that narrative has when it comes to the phenomenology of memory. This narrative is unavoidably selective in nature. 'If one cannot recall everything, neither can one recount everything. The idea of an exhaustive narrative is a performatively impossible idea. The narrative necessarily contains a selective dimension' (448). The close relation between 'declarative memory, narrativity, testimony, and the figured representation of the historical past' (448) is once again portrayed here. Memory can be ideologised because of its narrative configuration. Forgetting is directly implied in the process of narrative configuration because 'one can always recount differently' (448). Ricoeur then argues that, of all the levels at which narrative configuration and refiguration takes place, 'the handling of authorized, imposed, celebrated, commemorated history – official history' (448) – is the most dangerous. He explains:

'The resource of narrative then becomes a trap, when high powers take over this emplotment and impose a canonical narrative by means of intimidation or seduction, fear or flattery. A devious form of forgetting is at work here, resulting from stripping the social actors of their original power to recount their actions themselves. But this dispossession is not without a secret complicity, which makes forgetting a semi-passive, semi-active behaviour, as seen in forgetting by avoidance (*fuite*), the expression of bad faith and its strategy of evasion motivated by an obscure will not to inform oneself, not to investigate the harm done by the citizen's environment, in short by a wanting-not-to-know' (448-449).

Ricoeur argues that too little memory can be seen as passive forgetting and as a deficit in the work of memory. Furthermore, it can be a 'strategy of avoidance, of evasion, of flight' (449) that is an ambiguous form of forgetting – active as much as passive. Ricoeur rewrites the motto of the Enlightenment – *sapere aude! Move out of the state of tutelage!* – to say, "Dare to give an account yourself!" He expresses it in a way that begs to be quoted directly:

[Active forgetting] entails the same sort of responsibility as that imputed to acts of negligence, omission, imprudence, lack of foresight, in all of the situations of inaction, in which it appears after-the-fact to an enlightened and honest consciousness that one should have and could have known, or at least have tried to know, that one should have and could have intervened. In this way, as social agents remaster their capacity to give an account, one encounters once again along this path all of the obstacles related to the collapse of the forms of assistance that the memory of each person can find in the memory of others as they are capable of authorising, of helping to give, an account in the most intelligible, acceptable, and responsible manner' (449).

Opposed to the encouragement to "give an account yourself" is the prohibition of memory. We meet it most obviously in the practice of commanded forgetting, as is seen to take place in amnesty – an institutionalised form of forgetting. For Ricoeur amnesty has to do with judicial proceedings and the handing down of a sentence, and as already noticed in the discussion on the judge and the historian, Ricoeur is critical towards the idea of judging history, finding guilt, and sentencing. He is very much aware of the blurring of the boundaries between forgiveness and amnesia when it comes to amnesty.

When it comes to forgiveness, Ricoeur regards the right to pardon as a royal privilege which carries with it a residue of the quasi-divine. The problem with amnesty is that 'it brings to conclusion serious political disorders affecting civil peace – civil wars, revolutionary periods, violent changes of political regimes – violence that the amnesty is supposed to interrupt' (453). Furthermore, amnesty is characterised and authorised by the agency that establishes it. Ricoeur regards the proximity between amnesia and amnesty to be much more than phonetic and semantic in nature. He argues that the proximity 'between amnesty and amnesia signals the existence of a secret pact with the denial of memory, which... distances it from forgiving, after first suggesting a close simulation' (453).

Ricoeur uses as example the decree promulgated in Athens in 403 B.C. as recalled by Aristotle in *The Athenian Constitution* and the Edict of Nantes issued by Henry IV in France. In the documents citizens are "forbidden to recall the evils" to the extent of "something that has not occurred" (454). People are commanded to act as though nothing had taken place. Ricoeur argues that such a demand amounts to forgetting against forgetting: citizens are ordered to forget the disagreement about the harms suffered which they are now to forget.

Public opinion is deprived of the benefit of dissensus and competing memories are condemned to an unhealthy underground existence (455).

Ricoeur concludes the discussion on forgetting by stating that to the duty to remember, a corresponding duty to forget can never exist. Hence, amnesty may not be more than an urgent social therapy, and it can furthermore never serve truth, only utility. Without being ignorant of the phenomenon of forgetting, the truthful relation to the past remains the most important endeavour to the historian.

CHAPTER 4

SIGNPOSTS TOWARDS A RESPONSIBLE HISTORICAL HERMENEUTIC

Up to this point I have taken up Lategan's critique pertaining to the deficit in South African church and theological historiography (chapter 1) and proposed the work of Paul Ricoeur (as discussed in chapter 3) as a valuable resource in the search for an adequate methodology for church and theological historiography. If we maintain that for Ricoeur, regarding his work under discussion, the central question concerns the representation of the past, we cannot other than admit that this is also a concern for Christians – Christians who live daily with the convictions of their faith as measuring tool in life, as well as Christian theologians who engage these convictions in an academic manner. However, in my opinion, the question for Christians regarding the representation of the past has a twofold nature: on the one hand, Christians are involved in the representation of their Christian past(s), and on the other hand they are, as Christians, involved in the representation of the past – whether it entails their personal pasts, their political pasts, or their cultural pasts. Although I argue for the recognition of the twofold nature regarding the question of the past for Christians, I want to emphasise that, in my opinion, these two aspects can never exist in isolation from each other; they necessarily exist together. This would mean that a South African Christian always interprets her Christian past as a South African, and also that a Christian South African always understands his South African past from a Christian perspective.

On the one hand, Christians, from all spheres of South African life, need to come to terms with their Christian past(s). For example: in the South African Dutch Reformed circles this entails engaging the reality of a separated past, as is the case with the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa and the Dutch Reformed Church. It also entails engaging our Christian past, which stretches further and wider than the borders of our own country and includes the Christian tradition all over the world, as we see in the centenary of the 1910 Edinburgh International Missionary Conference.

On the other hand, the role of South African Christians stretches beyond their direct faith communities. We have seen this commitment of Christians to the world in which they live in the history of South Africa and the struggle against apartheid. However, living in post-

apartheid South Africa, a country still scarred, wounded and ill due to the legacy of apartheid, Christians have the responsibility to be agents who contribute to building a just, free and humane society.

The search for an adequate historiographical methodology that draws on responsible historical hermeneutics serves both these goals; in fact, I believe it to be imperative for the development and functioning of healthy faith communities and the broader society. In what follows I will point to five important signposts in historiography drawing on the work of Paul Ricoeur outlined up to this point. I hope to contribute to the work already done in this field, as well as explicating how and why the work of Paul Ricoeur is and should be part of this conversation.

1. The complexity of historiography

What is notable and praiseworthy about Ricoeur's work, first of all, is his respect for the complexity of memory and history, and of life as a whole. The comprehensive nature of his work is well-known, and in this regard he does not disappoint with *Memory, History, Forgetting*, where he engages the full sweep of classical and modern writings on memory and history. The issue of the representation of the past, as we have seen throughout the discussion, is for Ricoeur an issue of truthfulness.

Already in the discussion on the phenomenology of memory we have learnt that truthfulness in memory is not unambiguous. The entanglement of memory and imagination, running right through the history of memory in Western philosophy, confronts us with the difficulty of distinguishing between the *eikōn* and *phantasma*, together with the problematic of the absent intruding the present without itself really being present. Can the present representation of an absent thing ever be true to the original thing? Is our memory capable of recalling the past – gone, conflicted, and plural – truthfully? Does the past have any significant influence on the present and the future, and, if it does, should we allow this influence?

Ricoeur's reflection on these questions is evident from the way in which he discusses the status of the memory image of the past, the role of testimony as bearing witness to the occurrence of memory, the continuities and discontinuities between memory and history,

and the nature and place of forgetting (Pellauer, 2003:17-18). In continuity with these themes, Ricoeur's critique against the practice of historians, still in search of truth in history, includes the way in which historical knowledge depends on a use of documents as the source of its knowledge, the problem of writing in history, and the problem of written history (17).

Some of Ricoeur's earliest work collected in *History and Truth* (1965) also grappled with these issues. In the preface to this collection of essays Ricoeur states that all the essays are grouped around two poles: a methodological pole and an ethical pole. He stresses the point that the two poles share continuity in rhythm, and hence refuses to dissociate methodology and ethics from each other. This concern can also be seen in *Memory, History, Forgetting* where Ricoeur does not produce historical scholarship for its own sake, but is adamant that reflection on history must also have some application in the trajectories of civilisation. Ricoeur argues that the 'elucidation of directive concepts, according to which we are trying to *think* our insertion in history' and 'the concern for actively intervening in the crisis of our civilisation and thereby *giving testimony* to the force and efficacy of thought' (Ricoeur, 1965: 4) cannot be disconnected from each other. Concerning ourselves with the methodology of historiography is therefore also to concern us with the ethics of historiography.

The complexity of the methodology and the ethics of historiography illuminated by Ricoeur rest on his argument that, although the philosopher has the fundamental conviction that truth is ultimately singular, it is impossible to demonstrate this (Pellauer, 2003: 12-13). Part of the complexity of history is then the antinomy between history and truth. Truth as 'a regulative idea, as the task of unifying (or indeed imposing unity upon) the diversity' (Ricoeur, 1965: xiv) of knowledge, implies resolving differences in opinion and puts an end to the vertigo of variation that is more often than not inherent to history. One may even say that this notion of truth destroys history (xiv). Another notion of truth understands history in a different way. Here truth 'bears upon the singularities that emerge in the flux of time' (xiv) and systems are annihilated, and we end up in a kind of 'historical schizophrenia' (xiv). It is argued that both these models of truth would destroy history:

‘The system destroys history because history becomes engulfed in an immanent logic; singularity, too, is the end of history since all history is repudiated in it. Thus, Ricoeur argues, history is history only to the extent that it has reached neither the system nor absolute singularity; it remains history to the extent that the meaning of it remains confused and entangled. Previous to its fusion into system or singularity, history is essentially equivocal and in virtue of this, historical investigation cannot be but inexact; history cannot be objective; it can never completely *objectify* man (*sic*), either in the sense of regarding him as a “moment” in universal history, or in the sense of unfettering him from all relational ties and establishing him as a completely “singular essence”’ (Ricoeur, 1965: xiv).

From this we can see that for Ricoeur, history from a philosopher’s point of view, as the study of the past, ‘occupies a kind of intermediary position between a subjective pole and an objective pole’ (Pellauer, 2003: 13). Pellauer explains the difference between the subjective and the objective pole as follows:

‘The subjective pole refers to the very choice to study history and what history to study, the objective pole to the methodological assumptions that guide such enquiry. As such, what the historian produces will occupy a kind of middle ground, one that may be said to be broadly representative of human knowing in general. It will never be merely subjective, but neither can it ever claim to be simply objective’ (13).

If history then merely occupies a kind of middle ground between objectivity and subjectivity, can we at all say that history has meaning? Ricoeur’s answer to this question is deliberately ambiguous: ‘yes, insofar as we are able to approach universality and system; no insofar as this universality does violence to the life of individuals whose singularity always remains invincible’ (Ricoeur, 1965: xiii). The subjectivity and objectivity noticed in history points to many other divisive characteristics of human existence which Ricoeur is wary of bringing into a premature synthesis. He upholds the ambiguity. On the one hand he is sensitive to the singularity of individual existence; on the other, he has an urgent sense of universality and meaning, the uniqueness and oneness of human reality (Ricoeur, 1965: xiii).

The interplay between subjectivity and objectivity, and the unresolved tension⁴⁴ characteristic of Ricoeur’s philosophy are important markers in the project of history as sense-making. In chapter 1 I have argued, by drawing on Lategan, that history is a reality-

⁴⁴ The tension would be between a distrust of premature solutions, on the one hand, and the necessity to produce some kind of synthesis, on the other. Ricoeur is renowned for his ability to form some kind of productive dialectic between seeming contradictions.

related project, one that takes factuality seriously, but operates from the presumption that meaning is not intrinsic to facts, but is in fact generated through the creating of links and relationships. The tension with which Ricoeur works leaves room for the continuous reopening of questions. The reopening of questions is important for, as Pellauer argues, history 'is not only the what happened in the past, it includes the moving present that produces the history of the history book produced at a particular time and place' (Pellauer, 2003: 13).

The readiness to reopen questions is complementary to the fact that history, as a sense-making project, is never a closed project. For Ricoeur the creating of meaning and the search for truth should take place in an intersubjective context. In writing history we should emerge from the narrowness of our human condition, and this is, for Ricoeur, only possible through communication. His intersubjective definition of truth builds on this argument and holds that 'each person continually moves toward self-clarification by unfolding his (*sic*) perception of the world in communication with others. It is this conception of truth as intersubjective which enables different philosophies to elude the two models of truth which we listed above, the system and singularity' (Ricoeur, 1965: xv). It is, furthermore, also a circular process 'wherein the solution reached at one level will be rectified by bringing the initial problem back into question' (Ricoeur, 1965: 41). If truth is connected to communication it is only attainable if communication is total. But total communication is impossible and the "'task" of truth is therefore a constant one' (xv).

The complexity of history confronts us time and again with the question of whether the effort of studying and writing history is at all worthwhile. We cannot say that we, by implication, learn from history or that all history is truth. Above all, we cannot conclude that history is fixed, completed, or settled. We should rather admit that history is, at its best, vulnerable.

2. The vulnerability of history

The vulnerability of history is closely connected to the intimate relationship between history and memory. In Ricoeur's overview of the relation between memory and history he emphasises that witness and witnessing are vital components of history, as testimony

‘constitutes the fundamental transitional structure between memory and history’ (Ricoeur, 2004: 21). Without memory we would not have history. Memory is our only resource to the past. However, Ricoeur’s thorough discussion of the phenomenon of memory, also from the perspective of neuroscience, shows that memory is not straightforward. Moreover, memory exists in the face of forgetting. Memory is selective – it/one chooses carefully from a vast number of events before testifying about a specific situation. Also, the interplay between subjectivity and objectivity, discussed above, makes it impossible to give a complete recollection of the past.

Nevertheless, Ricoeur’s discussion about the uses and abuses of memory centres around his concern for the truthfulness of memory which, in turn, draws on his fervour for the capability of memory. But his emphasis on the capability of memory takes thorough cognisance of the limits and deficiencies of memory. The capability to remember is at one and the same time the capability to forget, and this two-fold capability is inevitably affected by blocked memory, manipulated memory, and forced memory. It is the capability to remember and the capability to forget that render history vulnerable.

The past, however, also renders us vulnerable. Hayden White articulates this vulnerability as follows: ‘It is memory after all that compels us to confront the enigma of how what is past can perdure into the present and, no matter how we might wish it, that refuses to go away on command but remains present to consciousness, even getting in the way of perception and pressing for attention however distracted we may be by current affairs’ (White, 2007: 234). We are at the same time masters of history and victims of the past. On the one hand, we can manipulate our memories of events by constructing renditions of the past into official histories so that they serve our interests and projects. This instrumentalisation of memory remembers one thing at the cost of another for the sake of power, and in this way creates identities in service of specific ideologies. On the other hand, neuroscience teaches us that blocked memory, or sick/wounded memory, takes hold of us, manipulates us, controls us and/or causes us to compulsively repeat the past. Such memory does not only live in our minds, it has a life of its own as it manifests in actions and repetitive patterns.

Ricoeur points to three lessons that we can learn from psychoanalysis (Ricoeur, 2004: 445-446). Firstly, the inaccessible blocked memory (or, one may say, the seemingly forgotten

memory) is not a harmless or undisruptive memory that can be overlooked. The trauma connected to the memory remains. The memory is there, yet not there; forgotten yet remembered. Secondly, entire sections of the reputedly forgotten past can return in particular circumstances. It constitutes the thesis of the *unforgettable* of which Freud was strongly convinced: the past, once experienced, is indestructible. And thirdly, remembering and mourning go hand in hand. Dealing with the past, working through it, is a process of mourning through which we separate ourselves from the loss of objects of love and hate. Through remembering, as through mourning, loss is integrated and we are freed from the grief that comes from sadness that has not completed the work of mourning. Ricoeur holds that 'joy is the reward for giving up the lost object and a token of reconciliation with its internalised object' (2004: 77). This is what Ricoeur calls "happy memory."

Official histories to a large extent deny the above mentioned lessons. Official histories cannot deal with trauma singularly; they too often attempt to unmake specific events, and seldom allow space for the mourning that leads to happy memory. The power, but also the danger of grand narratives lies in their handling of authorised, imposed, celebrated, commemorated history – of official history. They leave no room for recounting differently by 'eliminating, by shifting emphasis, by recasting the protagonists of the action in a different light along with the outlines of action' (Ricoeur, 2004: 448).

The vulnerability of history and the way in which it renders us vulnerable is all the more reason for sound historiographical methodology and responsible historical hermeneutics. The concern of historiography is a truthful relation to the past. True recollection brings about reconciliation between the present and the past, and this should be the aim of all remembering, memorisation and commemoration.

The concern for truth in recounting the past should make us, as Ricoeur warns, wary of the 'unconditional praise of memory' (Ricoeur, 2004: 86). Official histories are not always that obvious. Take, for example, South African history. It seems to be quite obvious that the history written during the period of white domination by this specific group should be read and handled with caution and that our ideological radars should be working overtime in order to pick-up on the manipulation and propaganda inherent to this history. While this might be the case, it does not mean that more recent history seemingly in service of

democracy should not be treated with the same caution. Ricoeur alerts us to the risks involved in uncritically giving to victims the status in history that used to belong to victors. Someone who assumes the status of victim has the right to complain, to protests, and to make demands. Ricoeur continues by arguing that the position of victim 'engenders an exorbitant privilege, which places everyone else in the position of owing a debt' (2004: 86), and therefore argues that 'the duty of memory is the duty to do justice, through memories, to an other than the self' (89). Justice in history is not merely to turn the past on its head. We should not try to set the injustices of the past straight through history.

3. The ambiguity of the archive

The complexity and vulnerability of history are also connected to the ambiguity of the archive. In the discussion on the documentary phase of the historiographical operation, the process of memory becoming documentary proof by way of testimony finding a place in the archive has been traced. In this process it is not only memory and testimony that we have to treat with suspicion, but also the archive – that collection of testimonies and facts. The archive is, of course, not only collected but also preserved and consulted (Ricoeur, 2004: 146). It is the combination of these three features that mainly contributes to the ambiguity of the archive. The ambiguity lies in the way the historian funds/contributes to the archive and the way she herself uses the archive in writing history. Only certain facts and testimonies reach the archive simply because everything that happens cannot be archived. As Pierre Nora, already quoted, said: "Archive as much as you like, something will always be left out." Furthermore, in using the archive, the historian asks certain and only particular questions to it. The archive does not speak for itself, and to a large extent, it answers only the questions posed to it. The historian has the ability to privilege or neglect certain aspects of the archive when dealing with it.

So much for the archive as collected and consulted. However, the archive is also preserved. In an essay titled, *Archiving otherwise: some remarks on memory and historical responsibility* (2005), Robert Vosloo engages with the influential work of Jacques Derrida on archiving, *Archive fever: a Freudian impression* (1996). Vosloo discusses Derrida's reflection on the "archive" itself and states that Derrida calls attention to the fact that *arkhē* at once refers to commencement and commandment (Vosloo. 2005: 381). 'An *arkheion* is "initially a

house, a domicile, and address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *arkhons*, those who commanded.” It was at this place of recognised authority that official documents were filed’ (382). Those who preserve the archive contribute to its ambiguity because, as Vosloo argues ‘the *arkhons* are not only responsible for the physical safety of that which is deposited, but they are also accorded the hermeneutical right and competence to interpret the archive’ (382). The archive thus consists of an exteriority of place and of a “law” (archontic principle) that determines the way in which the archive is to be treated. Vosloo argues that one should take note of these configurations constituting the archive, and that any discourse on memory and historiography that is not critical with regards to the archive should be ruptured and interrupted (383).

The archive is therefore a place (that is preserved) and a twofold act (collected and consulted).

Ricoeur’s work on historiography contributes to a responsible historical hermeneutic in particular because he equips us to deal with the archive in a critical way. He regards the archive not only as a physical or spatial place, but also as a social one (Ricoeur, 2004: 167) Ricoeur traces the development of the notion of the archive within historical research and states that ‘(i)n a period now taken to be outdated in historical research, work in the archive had the reputation of assuring the objectivity of historical knowledge, protected thereby from the historian’s subjectivity’ (169). The assumed authority of the archive over those who consult it signifies a passive understanding of consulting archives, as if the archive provides answers to questions that can speak for themselves and ask themselves.

Keeping in mind that we are in the first instance concerned with a history that serves life and one that honours the relation between the past, the present and the future, we ought to inquire in what sense the historian’s notion of the archive contributes to developing and maintaining such an understanding of history. In this regard Vosloo, too, helps us by arguing that Derrida’s *Archive fever* ‘serves as reminder of the need to remember the past, to burn with passion for the past, while at the same time remembering the future that is to come’ (Vosloo, 2005: 387). Our concern with the past, with justice, and with the future determines the seriousness with which we deal with the archive. Vosloo states that ‘(t)ogether with memory, or as a part thereof, archives and archiving are important sources and practices to

challenge oblivion and death' (387). He furthermore urges that '(r)esponsible remembering, historiography and archiving, aim at dealing with the past in such a way that the past retains the power to illuminate the present and the future' (387). If we realise the importance of the past with regards to the present and the future we need to deal responsibly with those things that preserve the past, such as archives. Despite the ambiguity of the archive, the traces of the past that we find in it remain valuable. Still, the traces ask to be interpreted and configured into a narrative.

The concern for justice and also for just and truthful history is linked to the way the archive is collected, preserved, and consulted. The openness of history is subsequently also determined by the archive – the new questions posed to it, the continuous effort to expand the archive and to include the testimonies of the marginalised, the willingness to challenge the dominant constructions of the past and to write history from various perspectives. Such an approach to history bears on an understanding of the archive as something that is never closed; it enforces the realisation that the historian's work is not merely related to things gone, but is also concerned with things to come.

4. Judgment and forgiveness in history

The openness of history has been a key point of discussion in Ricoeur's comparison of the task of the historian and the task of the judge, too. These tasks were shown to be remarkably close to one another, specifically because of their shared concern with truth and justice, the importance of testimony in both tasks – including the concern with proof and the critical examination of the credibility of witnesses – and their claim to be occupying the apparent position of a third party.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, despite the similarities there is an implicit structural difference in the tasks in which the historian partakes, and those in which the judge plays a role. Ricoeur argues that the tasks can be divided into two phases: the deliberative phase, and the concluding phase. The similarities between the operation of the historian and the trial of the judge would be situated in the deliberative phase, where different accounts of the same event are collected.

⁴⁵ The third-party position is attached to a claim of impartiality. Of course we expect of the judge and the historian to be impartial, but Ricoeur warns us that, exactly because we are concerned with truth and justice, the vow of impartiality must 'be considered in light of the impossibility of an absolute third party' (Ricoeur, 2004: 314).

The difference between the tasks of the historian and the judge, however, lies in the concluding phase: in the case of a judicial trial, a judgment is passed. The judge renders a verdict, 'guilty, innocent, mistrial, not proven, etc., a verdict that effectively exonerates the accused or leads to sentencing and punishment for a crime' (White, 2007: 239). In the case of the historical operation, the historian is deliberately withholding him-/herself from passing a judgment. Whereas a judge concludes a trial with finality, 'historians must always come to conclusions that can only be provisional and subject in principle to infinite revision... (E)very historian's book or article must remain open to revision and supplementation – either in the light of discovery of new evidence, or of changing notions of how evidence is to be assessed, or of changing ideas regarding the idea of "responsibility" for one's actions...' (White, 2007: 239).

The finality of the task of the judge can never belong to the task of the historian. The judge pronounces a verdict whereby a trial is concluded and people are divided into two groups: the victims and the convicted. The work of the historian is subjected to perpetual writing and revising. To a certain extent the work of the historian is directly opposed to that of the judge: the historian should always point to those events that 'can never be fully and finally dealt with, because their shadows are cast down the ages for communities that have them in their pasts' (White, 2007: 240). In this case, the task of the historian is 'to keep memory of them alive, rather than to try to wrap them up, classify them, and return them to the archive' (240).

Ricoeur's uneasiness with passing judgments and pronouncing guilty and innocent parties in history hints towards the notion of forgiveness in history and how it should be dealt with. Forgiveness only has a place in history if the guilty and the innocent can be identified. In what other way can we decide who should forgive and who should be forgiven? However, Ricoeur's unwillingness to allow a place for the pronouncement of verdicts in historiography implies that forgiveness cannot function as an appeasement for the injustices of the past.

The discomfort brought about by speaking about the place of forgiveness in history is what prompts Ricoeur to discuss forgiveness outside of the main text of his work. As mentioned earlier, he deals with forgiveness only in the epilogue to *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Ricoeur hereby shows that a place for forgiveness does exist, although he remains hesitant

to let that place be on equal level with memory, history and forgetting. Drawing on Derrida, Ricoeur states that

‘(e)ach time that forgiveness is in the service of finality, be it noble and spiritual (repurchase or redemption, reconciliation, salvation), each time that it tends to re-establish a normalcy (social, national, political, psychological) through a work of mourning, through some therapy or ecology of memory, then “forgiveness” is not pure – nor is its concept. Forgiveness is not, and it should not be, either normal, or normative, or normalising. It should remain exceptional and extraordinary, standing the test of the impossible: as if it interrupted the ordinary cause of historical temporality’ (Ricoeur, 2004: 470).

To a large extent, Ricoeur deals with forgiving from a strongly theological point of view whereas the whole of the rest of this work was purely philosophical. For this reason it is difficult to deal with the notion of forgiveness, as it will ask of us to, at this late state, open a discussion that we have not touched on at all up to this point. The critical question, however, remains whether it is legitimate for church and theological historiography to bracket forgiveness in the way that Ricoeur has. And if not, how should we responsibly deal with forgiveness in history without falling in the trap of confusing the work of the judge and the work of the historian? Furthermore, how do we value the openness of history in the face of forgiveness? I will not attempt to answer these questions.

5. History that serves life

In chapter one I have argued, by drawing mainly on Lategan, that history and the way we practise it should enable us to live – that is, history should be used to open up new and meaningful ways for us to approach life and engage with the challenges it poses. Our pasts, and the meanings we attach to and draw from them, should not strangle us, should not cause us to die or give up on life. However, we have, by way of Ricoeur, come to see that our engagement with the past is a complex, vulnerable, and ambiguous endeavour, but one that we are, nonetheless, obliged to approach in a truthful manner if we are concerned with responsible historical hermeneutics. Furthermore, history is not about being busy with the past as if it is a time gone by, but about understanding how that time is still playing itself out today and how it is influencing us positively and negatively. In the search for an adequate historiographical methodology, this implies that we have no right to deal with the past as if it is something cheap or something we possess to do with as we please. It is precisely

because life and the past is costly that I argue for a responsible historical hermeneutic. This is in many ways the argument Friedrich Nietzsche posed in his nineteenth century *Unfashionable Observations* in an essay titled *On the Utility and Liability of History for Life* (1873)⁴⁶ that we have referred to more than once. In chapter three I hinted at this text by giving a swift overview of the way that Ricoeur deals with it in *Memory, History, Forgetting*. However, I deem it necessary at the end of my argument to engage with this text of Nietzsche more thoroughly than merely by way of Ricoeur.

Before we deal with Nietzsche, a quick citation from a novel of the South African-born writer, J.M. Coetzee is appropriate. In his novel, *Elizabeth Costello* (2004), the main character, Elizabeth Costello – an Australian writer – gives a speech on the occasion of receiving the *Stowe Award* in Williamstown, Pennsylvania. The character ends the speech, with the topic *What is Realism?* – later on she is criticised for choosing a topic that is no longer suitable for Americans who ‘no longer react well to heavy historical self-ironization’ (25) – with the following words:

“‘There must be some limit to the burden of remembering that we impose on our children and grandchildren. They will have a world of their own, of which we should be less and less part’” (20).

A few pages later, the same character gives a lecture on a luxurious cruise ship. The title of the lecture is *The Future of the Novel*. She begins the lecture by stating that she is neither interested in the future of the novel, nor in the future in general. She continues with a remarkable explication of the relation between the past, the present and the future:

“What is the future, after all, but a structure of hopes and expectations? Its residence is in the mind; it has no reality.

“Of course, you might reply that the past is likewise a fiction. The past is history, and what is history but a story made of air that we tell ourselves? Nevertheless, there is something miraculous about the past that the future lacks. What is miraculous about the past is that we have succeeded – God knows how – in making thousands of millions of individual fictions, fictions created by individual human beings, lock well enough into one another to give us what look like a common past, a shared story.

⁴⁶ In the translation of this text by Ian Johnston, the title is translated as *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life*. I deem it necessary to take note of both translations, as the words “use” and “abuse” overagainst “utility” and “liability” have slightly different nuances to it.

“The future is different. We do not possess a shared story of the future. The creation of the past seems to exhaust our collective creative energies. Compared with our fiction of the past, our fiction of the future is a sketchy, bloodless affair, as visions of heaven tend to be. Of heaven and even of hell” (38).

It might be an odd thing to speak of Coetzee and Nietzsche in one breath, but I sense that the character in Coetzee’s novel is spot-on with her understanding of the relation between the past, present and the future (although one might be critical of her notion of an inclusive and common history), and the argument that the way we deal with the past in the present determines the future. Furthermore, as is evident in the first quotation from Coetzee, history is a matter of memory and of forgetting. Depending on our understanding of the past, the future can be a future of death, or a future of life. It is when we are concerned with death and life that we are compelled to be concerned with the methodology at work in our writing of history, and because life and death depend on the way we deal with our past we ought to be concerned with a responsible historical hermeneutic.

We now turn to Nietzsche. Nietzsche argues that history is not useful per se; it is in itself not a goal to strive towards. He considers the worth and the worthlessness of history. According to Nietzsche, history, as an expensive and luxurious surplus of knowledge, is superfluous and opposed to what is essential. Despite his critique against certain uses of history, he never claims that we do not need history – but we need it in a different manner: ‘(t)hat is, we need it for life and action, not for a comfortable turning away from life and action or merely for glossing over the egotistical life and the cowardly bad act. We wish to use history only insofar as it serves living. But there is a degree of doing history and a valuing of it through which life atrophies and degenerates’ (Nietzsche, 1873: 1).

Nietzsche explains that these observations are unfashionable or untimely because they are utterly out of touch with the times in which he lived. His time, he claims, is one that is immensely proud of its historical culture – something Nietzsche describes as a disgrace and a defect. He argues that people suffer from a consumptive historical fever whilst being unaware of it. People regard their historical culture as a virtue, but Nietzsche calls it a hypertrophic virtue, which, he warns, drawing on Goethe, is as dangerous as a hypertrophic vice. He is mesmerised by the historical culture of humans and the sorrow it brings; the inability of women and men to forget which forces them to always hang onto past things. In

the end these past things hang onto them like chains from which they cannot escape. Such is human memory: that an event that occurred in an instant and lasted only a few moments becomes a memory that haunts one, that comes back again and again and 'disturbs the tranquillity of each later moment' (3).

Opposed to the historical is, for Nietzsche, the unhistorical. Someone who lives unhistorically, like a child who is not yet bothered by the past, is able to live 'in blissful blindness between the fences of the past and the future' (3). But Nietzsche admits that such a life, an unhistorical life, is impossible to live. Very soon the child discovers his or her own memory and the struggle, suffering and weariness that comes with it, so that existence is basically nothing else than 'a never completed past tense' (4). It is only death that brings the forgetting that we so long for – and, as is obvious, 'death destroys present existence and thus impresses its seal on the knowledge that existence is only an uninterrupted living in the past...' (4). In coherence with this line of argument, Nietzsche concludes that true happiness, even if it is only an instance of happiness, is only possible in the face of forgetting. One can only experience happiness if one has the capacity to sense and experience things unhistorically.

'The person who cannot set himself (or herself) down on the crest of the moment, forgetting everything from the past, who is not capable of standing on a single point, like a goddess of victory, without dizziness or fear, will never know what happiness is. Even worse, he (or she) will never do anything to make other people happy. Imagine the most extreme example, a person who did not possess the power of forgetting at all, who would be condemned to see everywhere a coming into being' (4).

Nietzsche sees remembering and forgetting as belonging to life in the same way as light and darkness do – without darkness there can be no light, and vice versa. He remarkably states that '(t)here is a degree of insomnia, of rumination, of the historical sense, through which living comes to harm and finally is destroyed, whether it is a person or a people or a culture' (4). He argues that a boundary for history should be determined to guard against it becoming the gravedigger of the present. In an almost too encompassing statement, nonetheless significant, he claims that 'cheerfulness, good conscience, joyful action, trust in what is to come – all that depends, with the individual as with a people, on the following facts: that there is a line which divides the observable brightness from the unilluminated

darkness, that we know how to forget at the right time just as well as we remember at the right time, that we feel with powerful instinct the time when we must perceive historically and when unhistorically. This is the specific principle which the reader is invited to consider: *that for the health of a single individual, a people, and a culture the unhistorical and the historical are equally essential*' (5). Nietzsche qualifies this statement of his by arguing that it is through thinking, reflecting, comparing, separating and combining that a person first becomes a person. In this sense the past is used for living 'and making history out of what has happened' (6) – thus the human being is involved in activities of historicity. However, an excess of history prevents the human from being human altogether. Historicity is only possible because a certain sense of unhistoricity exists from which a person dares to explore the past.

Yet, it is important to note that the link between the past, present and future is not one Nietzsche necessarily sees to be an example of progress.⁴⁷ Even if people have an historical consciousness, or are part of an historical culture, as Nietzsche calls it, there is no guarantee that the next ten years will be any different (never mind better) than the past ten years. He argues that, as historical beings, we may also fall into the trap of elevating ourselves up to a *superhistorical* standpoint. A *superhistorical* person would be one who has lost the temptation to continue living and to participate in history. 'For he (or she) would have recognized the single condition of every event, that blindness and injustice in the soul of the man (or woman) of action. He himself would have been cured from now on of taking history excessively seriously. But in the process [she] would have learned, for every person and for every experience... to answer for [herself] the question how and why they conducted their lives' (7).

Nietzsche argues that 'anyone who asks his (or her) acquaintances whether they would like to live through the last ten or twenty years again' (7) will be met unanimously by the answer "No!" That "No!" can, however, be substantiated in different ways. Some do not want to live through the last ten or twenty years again because they believe that the next ten or twenty years will, without doubt, be better. Those who answer like this, will be classified, according to Nietzsche, as historical. Nietzsche explains people like this as follows:

⁴⁷ Taking into account that Nietzsche lived in the nineteenth century, we can assume for now that the critique against progress, observed in certain circles, was not as fierce then as it has become today.

‘The glance into the past pushes them into the future, fires their spirit to take up life for a longer time yet, kindles the hope that justice may still come and that happiness may sit behind the mountain to which they are walking. These historical people believe that the meaning of existence will come increasingly to light in the course of its process. Therefore they look backwards only to understand the present by considering the previous process and to learn to desire the future more keenly. In spite of all their history, they do not understand at all how unhistorically they think and act and also how their concern with history stands, not in service to pure knowledge, but to living’ (8).

As opposed to this “No!” there is also a “No!” with a different grounding which belongs to superhistorical people. This denial comes from those who ‘do not see healing in the process and for whom the world is much more complete and at its end in every moment. What would ten new years teach that the past ten years has not been able to teach!’ (8). For these people

‘the past and the present are one and the same, that is, in all their multiplicity typically identical and, as unchanging types everywhere present, they are a motionless picture of immutable values and eternally similar in meaning. As the hundreds of different languages correspond to the same typically permanent needs of people, so that someone who understood these needs could learn nothing new from all the languages, so the superhistorical thinker illuminates for himself (herself) all the histories of people and of individuals from within... (8).

Nietzsche states that it might be true that superhistorical people seemingly possess much more wisdom than historical people, but if that is the case, he continues, one has to agree that historical people (amongst whom he counts himself) possess much more life. In a gush of sarcasm he exclaims that ‘at any rate our lack of wisdom will have more of a future than their wisdom’ (9). With this he makes the clear, and to his mind important, distinction between an understanding of history that serves knowledge (or wisdom) and an understanding of history that serves life.

Accordingly, Nietzsche critiques history that is conceived of as pure knowledge and that functions as a sovereign conclusion to living. He is of the opinion that a historical culture should be ruled and led by a higher force and not be in the position to govern itself or to lead the way. Only when history is subordinated can it bring with it ‘a powerful new stream of life, a developing culture, for example, something healthy with future promise’ (9).

History that stands in the service of life is history that stands in the service of an unhistorical power and can therefore never become pure science.

Nevertheless, the critical question is still to what extent life requires the service of history. 'For with a certain excess of history, living crumbles away and degenerates' (9). Is life really in need of history?

I would like to argue that life is in need of history for as long as our understanding of history concerns more than the past. Ricoeur proposes 'a properly dialectical conception of history' (302) which includes the past, the present, and the future and is based on a good theoretical foundation. Hayden White argues that this does not mean that historians are conditioned to avoid theory, but the fact is that they 'typically go to the social sciences for models and methods of research...' (2007: 247). White continues by noting the fact that historians seemingly have no use for theories about history. The referent, in the work of the historian, is a presupposition. 'They only have to find it and identify it; they do not, as in other sciences, have to constitute it "theoretically" ...' (247).

Moreover, White states that historians 'simply presume or presuppose "the present" as the relatively stable platform from which to launch their investigations of an equally stable (because it is over and done with, a dead and fixed) past. This present is treated as if it were not only stable but also epistemically neutral or at least could be neutralised in such a way as to be inconsequential as a distorting factor in the historian's perceptual apparatus' (247). It does not take much to show that neither Nietzsche nor Ricoeur would consider such an approach to history adequate. Ricoeur's dialectical conception of history does not allow for such a stagnant concept of history, and Nietzsche would scarcely deem it sufficient as a history serving life. The point I would like to make, however, is that the dialectic relation between the past, present and the future proposed by Ricoeur is not obvious, and not all historians approach their work in this way.

From Coetzee and Nietzsche we learn that a historical culture in itself is not necessarily desirable and that the interconnectedness of the past, present and future is not a given. A historical culture – the way in which we approach the past, understand it, and learn from it – should enable us to live. It asks for a responsible historical hermeneutic. When Ricoeur appeals to historians to turn their expertise to the study of the relation between the past,

the present and the future he does so to cultivate a different kind of historical culture ‘that would function pedagogically to create a citizen capable of acting responsibly’ (White, 2007: 247) in the world. Paul Ricoeur’s work on the representation of the past helps us to construct a responsible historical hermeneutic that enables life and cultivates capable human beings.

Ricoeur begins *Memory, History, Forgetting* with a picture of baroque sculpture found in the Wiblingen Monastery, Ulm. The sculpture portrays the dual figures of history. In the foreground is Kronos, the winged god – an old man with wreathed brow. His left hand grips a large book, and his right hand attempts to tear out a page. Behind and above Kronos stands history itself. The gaze is grave and searching. One foot topples a horn of plenty from which spills a cascade of gold and silver. It is a sign of instability. The left hand checks the act of the god, while the right hand displays history’s instruments: the book, the inkpot, and the stylus.

The work of Ricoeur is to a large extent an explication of the different layers of meanings and implications of this sculpture. The sculpture points to the relation between memory, history, and forgetting, but Ricoeur, in addition to this relation, understands that the representation of the past stands in the service of life. For that reason he ends his work with the following words (Ricoeur, 2004: 506):

*Under history, memory and forgetting.
Under memory and forgetting, life.
But writing a life is another story.
Incompletion.*

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